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VERDUN: HELL IN THE TRENCHES



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## Medieval king-killer

Henry IV's  
bloody rise  
to the throne

**The *Dad's Army* guide  
to fighting Hitler**

**Benjamin Franklin**

From British patriot  
to American hero

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LOVES ITS  
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FEBRUARY 2016

# WELCOME

**BBC** **HiSTORY**  
MAGAZINE

“In one of the most famous passages of Shakespeare’s *Richard II*, the title character declares: “For God’s sake, let us sit upon the ground / And tell sad stories of the death of kings.” Richard’s mournful words reflect his own fraught situation during the **rebellion of his cousin Henry Bolingbroke**, who would replace him on the throne as Henry IV. After deposing and, almost certainly, murdering Richard, Henry’s 14-year reign would prove to be a perilous one, haunted by the ghost of his predecessor. Writing in this month’s cover feature, Henry’s latest biographer, Chris Given-Wilson, shows how the king’s enemies at home and abroad used the death of Richard to continually undermine his successor’s legitimacy. Turn to page 22 to read the full story.

We are now approaching a number of major First World War anniversaries, beginning this issue with the **centenary of Verdun**. Although Britain had limited involvement in this Franco-German bloodbath, the battle would have major ramifications for the entire conflict and would help shape the later clash on the Somme. On page 56, David Reynolds explains all.

The Second World War is also on our minds this month, as the **new *Dad’s Army* film** arrives in cinemas. Thanks to the much-loved sitcom, Britain’s Home Guard are often seen as bumbling fools who were fortunately never called into action. But does this image match the reality? On page 30, Leo McKinsty offers some surprising conclusions.



## Rob Attar

Editor

BSME Editor of the Year 2015, Special Interest Brand

## THIS ISSUE’S CONTRIBUTORS



### David Reynolds

For the British, 2016 will be the centenary of the battle of the Somme. My article, and two related BBC Radio 4 programmes, highlight France’s great battle of 1916 – Verdun – still a sacred name in French memory.

● **David Reynolds writes about Verdun on page 56**



### Stephanie Barczewski

The British love of failed heroes is often linked to postwar national decline. But in reality, it was a product of the era in which Britannia ruled the waves and a means for mitigating the uncomfortable realities of imperial power.

● **Stephanie considers British failure on page 45**



### Simon Sebag Montefiore

The court was incredibly important in Romanov Russia, both as a spectacle to project majesty and as a place to keep factions happy. If you didn’t handle the court right in Russia, you were quite liable to be murdered.

● **Simon talks about his new book on the Romanovs on page 65**

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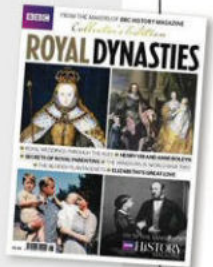
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CORBIS/GETTY/WM/BRIDGEMAN



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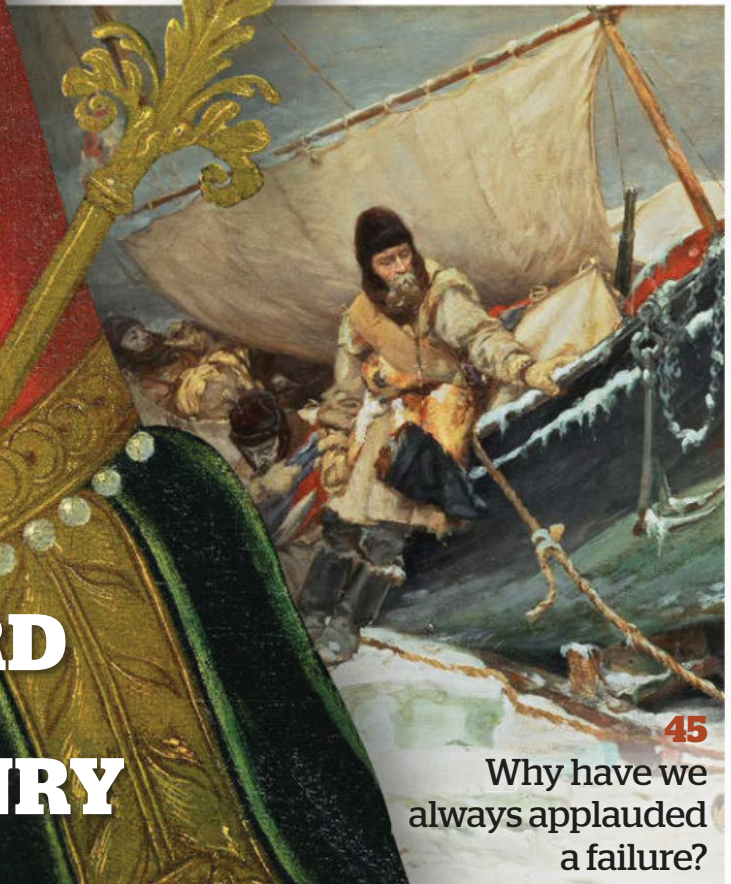
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**"RUMOURS  
THAT RICHARD  
WAS ALIVE  
PLAGUED HENRY  
FOR YEARS"**



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Why have we  
always applauded  
a failure?





**Dominic Sandbrook** highlights events that took place in **February** in history

# ANNIVERSARIES

**15 February 1971**

## Britain switches to decimal currency

*It's out with the old and in with the new as Britain dumps 'pounds, shillings and pence' to go decimal*

**F**or Edward Heath, 15 February 1971 was a glorious day. This was the day when, after years of preparation, Britain's old pounds, shillings and pence would be consigned to history, definitively replaced with a new decimal currency. Although the foundations had been laid well before Heath became prime minister, there was no better symbol of his ambitions to lead Britain into a shiny new European future.

In the run-up to Decimal Day, Edward Heath's ministers spared no effort to preach the virtues of the new currency, even commissioning a song by Max Bygraves. The BBC organised a series of information shows called *Decimal Five*, while ITV put on a little drama, *Granny Gets the Point*, showing a baffled old lady learning how to use the new coins.

In London's West End, self-proclaimed 'anti-decimal terrorists' handed out leaflets denouncing the change, but nobody else seemed especially bothered. Harrods had an army of 'decimal penny' girls in rakish boaters to help confused shoppers, while Selfridges boasted a troop of girls dressed in "shorts and midi split skirts and other suitably mathematical costumes". All in all, though, Decimal Day went off without a hitch.

Yet many people remained suspicious of the new currency, and many people carried 'Decimal Adders' to work out the difference between old and new. Of course the new notes and coins caught on eventually. But people never seemed quite as fond of them as of the old money – the 'real' money, some said.



Baron Fiske, chairman of the Decimal Currency Board, 'decimal shopping' at Woolworths in the Strand on the first day of national decimalisation in 1971

**26 February 1815**

## Napoleon escapes from Elba

*The exile makes a daring attempt to regain his throne*

**S**ince the island of Elba lies barely six miles from the coast of Tuscany, it was not, perhaps, the ideal place for the victorious allied powers to imprison Napoleon Bonaparte after his defeat in 1814. Few of them, though, could have imagined that it would take him only nine months to escape – or that his return would culminate in such bloodshed.

Since his arrival the previous April, Napoleon had treated the island as his own little kingdom, strutting about like a dictator and even training his own militia. On 26 February 1815, for example, he spent the morning at Mass and then dined with his mother and sister, before dipping into one of his favourite books, a life of the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, one of the few monarchs in history whose grandeur seemed to match his own. Deep down, he must have been simmering with excitement, for this was the day he planned to get away and reclaim his throne.

Napoleon's escape had been arranged for an evening when his friends were reasonably sure that British and French patrol ships would be otherwise engaged. As he rode down that night to the port, where the brig *Inconstant* was waiting for him, local villagers lined the streets, cheering and tossing their hats. With him came 600 Old Guard grenadiers, as well as a motley collection of associates – the former generals Bertrand, Drouot and Cambronne, but also a doctor, a pharmacist and a mining inspector.

As the brig carried him towards the French coast, Napoleon strolled confidently on deck, chatting with the soldiers and sailors. "Lying down, sitting, standing and strolling around him, familiarly, they asked him unceasing questions," wrote one of his lancers, "to which he answered unreservedly and without one sign of anger or impatience."

GETTY IMAGES



**Dominic Sandbrook** is a historian and presenter. His latest series, *Let Us Entertain You*, recently aired on BBC Two



The exiled French emperor Napoleon makes a triumphant departure from Elba, shown in a 19th-century painting by Joseph Beaume. His escape led to a series of battles before his final defeat at Waterloo on 18 June

GETTY IMAGES



**28 February 1710**

In the last major Danish invasion of Sweden, some 14,000 Danish troops are defeated at the **battle of Helsingborg**.

**14 February 1804**

In a remote Serbian village, local nationalists led by Black George Petrovic launch a **rising against the Ottoman empire**.



**11 February 1990**

In perhaps the greatest upset in sporting history, **42-1 outsider Buster Douglas (in white shorts) beats Mike Tyson** to become heavyweight champion of the world.



The martyrdom of St Sebastian in a 16th-century painting. Sebastian was a member of the Praetorian Guard who was secretly a Christian. When his beliefs were discovered, the emperor Diocletian had him killed

**23 February 303**

## Diocletian orders massive persecution of Christians

*The Roman emperor launches a crackdown, in which churches, books and relics are destroyed and believers are killed*

**I**n the year 303, the Roman emperor Diocletian had been in power for almost 20 years. Since assuming the purple, he had steadily reorganised the Roman system, sharing power with three junior partners.

And it was one of these men, his son-in-law Galerius – a religious conservative who had commanded the army against the Persians – who persuaded Diocletian that it was time to crack down on the Christians.

After an argument about their religious policy in the winter of 302, Galerius and Diocletian decided to resolve it by consulting the oracle of Apollo at Didyma. The oracle's verdict came back: the presence of the “just on Earth”, it said, was preventing it from speaking. By this, Galerius insisted, it meant the Christians.

On 23 February, Diocletian made his move. It was the feast-day of Terminus, the god of the boundary-marker – an

appropriate day to begin the termination of Christianity. At first he ordered that the new Christian church in the eastern city of Nicomedia be destroyed and its treasures seized. But the next day he went further. In his Edict Against the Christians, Diocletian ordered that all Christian churches, books and relics be obliterated. Christians were banned from religious meetings or from appearing in court, while all Christian senators, civil servants and officers were stripped of their titles.

Although Diocletian ordered that the edict be carried out “without bloodshed”, officials in the east in particular quickly resorted to the death penalty, burning Christians alive if they resisted. But the truth was that Christianity was too deeply embedded in Roman culture to be rooted out. As one historian puts it, the persecution was “too little, too late”.



10 February 1306

## Robert Bruce murders John Comyn

*Amid accusations of betrayal, Robert kills his rival for the Scottish throne*

**W**hen John Comyn walked into Greyfriars Kirk on the morning of 10 February 1306, he could have had little idea what awaited him. As Lord of Badenoch and Lochaber, the 'Red Comyn', as he was known, was one of the most powerful men in Scotland.

Just a few years earlier he had served as one of the two Guardians of Scotland, along with his rival Robert Bruce. But relations between the two men had long since deteriorated into outright hatred. Both believed that they had a right to the Scottish throne; both had a history of playing their English neighbours off against their Scottish rivals.

Precisely what happened in the second half of 1305 remains unclear, but Bruce's friends later claimed that, having sworn to uphold his rival's claim to the throne,

Comyn had gone back on his promise and betrayed him to the English. In any case, the two men made a deal to meet before the altar of the Greyfriars Kirk in Dumfries – leaving their swords outside – where they could settle their differences.

It was, of course, a trap. As legend has it, Comyn had no sooner taken his place before the altar than Bruce pulled out a knife and stabbed him through the heart. Running from the church, Bruce bumped into a group of his friends.

"Pale, bloody and in much agitation," as Walter Scott later put it, Bruce was nonetheless worried that he had failed to finish his rival off. "Do you leave such a matter in doubt?" one of his friends said. "I will make sure!" A few moments later, Bruce's friends were at the altar. Their knives rose and fell. Comyn was dead. It was a crime, wrote Scott, that was to be "followed by the displeasure of Heaven; for no man ever went through more misfortunes than Robert Bruce". ■



After arranging a truce, Robert Bruce stabs 'Red Comyn' before the altar at Greyfriars church at Dumfries, seen in an early 20th-century illustration

### COMMENT / Michael Brown

#### "Comyn's death reignited resistance to the authority of Edward I"

**“**A single act of personal violence can have huge consequences. The killing of John Comyn by Robert Bruce and his friends was fuelled by personal antagonism and political rivalry. Whether planned or not, the deed placed Bruce on a path that led to his seizure of the throne of Scotland six weeks later.

Comyn's death divided Scotland between warring factions and reignited resistance to the authority of Edward I and the English crown. Though he was defeated at the battle of Methven in 1306, Robert's fortunes revived the following year and, after the death of Edward I, he was

gradually able to win recognition as king. The events at Dumfries would start the transformation of Robert Bruce from a slippery aristocrat to a king whose rule would embody Scotland's independence for future generations. Robert's success against internal enemies and his victories over Edward II, most notably at Bannockburn, had a transformative effect on the Scottish realm.

In February 1306 Scotland was a conquered land under the government of the king of England. Instead of a future as a peripheral province of the Plantagenets, the achievements of Bruce led to a

Scotland which, for the next 400 years, remained a self-conscious European nation and state. **”**



**Michael Brown** is professor of medieval Scottish history at the University of St Andrews. His most recent book is *Disunited Kingdoms: Peoples and Politics in the British Isles 1280–1460* (Pearson, 2013)



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**Sale of the centuries**  
Merchants sell gold, silver, cloth and shoes in this medieval miniature. Our love of 'things' dates back much further than we sometimes think, argues Frank Trentmann

## Why our material world is older than you might believe

Far from being a postwar trend, a new study suggests that consumerism spans centuries – and that this history may be key to our future. **Matt Elton** reports

**Y**ou might think, as you browse your smartphone or return those last unwanted Christmas gifts, that consumerism – buying and using large amounts of material goods and services – is a uniquely modern phenomenon. Yet new research suggests that it's part of a much longer trend, and acknowledging this may prove crucial in the coming decades.

This research is notable because it has previously been widely assumed that mass public consumerism was a result of greater affluence in the decades after the Second World War – particularly the 1960s and 70s. Yet Frank Trentmann – whose new book,

*Empire of Things: How We Became a World of Consumers, from the 15th Century to the 21st*, is published by Allen Lane this month – argues that our love of 'stuff' goes back much further. "Until recently, the history of consumption has been told as an Anglo-American saga that began in the 18th century and reached a peak after 1945 in the US – which then exported the American way of life to the rest of the world," he says. "Yet its history is much richer, more interesting and more unsettling than critics of affluence realise."

Trentmann suggests that, as early as the Renaissance, 'things' came to be valued as





**Trading places** Merchants exchange goods in India in this 16th-century image. Such trade provided consumers with a wide range of products: “By the late 17th century, cotton already came in a huge variety of patterns,” says Frank Trentmann

enriching for humanity and civilisation. He points to the growing trade in goods such as carpets and silks in the 12th century and, from 1500, the spread of tea and porcelain from China to Europe.

Focusing on such trade is vital, says Trentmann, because it corrects the western bias of previous takes on consumerism. But he also argues that, even when experts acknowledge the broader picture, they often misunderstand how consumerism has developed.

“The conventional view is one of ‘needs’ and ‘wants,’” he says. “It argues that poor societies focus on basic needs, such as food and housing, while only rich societies develop a taste for things they don’t really need: entertainment, fashion and gadgets. ‘Consumerism’, in this view, is new: the child of affluence and the economic miracle of the 1960s and 70s.”

Trentmann – who is professor of history at Birkbeck, University of London – points to case studies that buck this trend. Even in the 17th century, for instance, customers were being advised on the best cotton to buy: “We tend to speak of cotton in the singular, but by the late 17th century it already came in a huge variety of colours and patterns,” he says.

“For the entire past year, Heidi wrote, she had ‘passionately longed’ for the more stylish Lambretta moped”

Even in the 20th century, little more than a decade before the affluence boom, Trentmann cites the example of Heidi Simon, a girl growing up in a West Germany ruined by the destruction of the Second World War. “Heidi entered a 1952 government-run amateur photography contest and won one of the top prizes: a Vespa moped,” he says. “But officials may have been surprised by her response. Heidi was very happy to have won, she wrote, but without trying to sound ‘impertinent’, wondered if she could not rather have a Lambretta – as, for the entire past year, she had longed ‘passionately’ for that more stylish moped. Officials refused and sent her the Vespa.”

Such examples may appear one-offs, but Trentmann argues they reveal how people have always desired ‘stuff’. “Heidi lived in the midst of rubble – and she did not ask for bricks and mortar but for a more fashionable moped,” he says.

So why is this important? Trentmann suggests that understanding consumerism’s historical context may help us deal with its negative effects today. “We need to recognise that our lifestyles, which I’d argue are unsustainable, are not a recent innovation we can easily fix by changing the postwar growth pattern, but instead the result of a longer history,” he says.

Yet there are ways in which this new approach could help us deal with the challenges of the future. “A longer view of history shows just how changeable people’s lifestyles and ideas of comfort and convenience have been,” says Trentmann.

## WHAT WE’VE LEARNED THIS MONTH...

### Major discoveries have been made in Leicester

Artefacts and remains from the Roman and medieval eras have been found in major archaeological digs in Leicester. Experts describe the discovery of 23 Roman skeletons as “one of the most significant finds” made in the city in recent years, while other objects – unearthed in the Newland and Southgates areas – include tableware, coins, bone hairpins and a decorated comb.

### Experts can’t find Poland’s Nazi gold train

There is no evidence that a Second World War-era train rumoured to be laden with gold and gems has been found in Poland, experts say. Although Piotr Koper and Andreas Richter told local authorities of the supposed location of the train in August 2015, researchers exploring the site say that there may be a tunnel but no train. However, Koper disputed the study’s methods, and maintains that the train – which, according to local legend, went missing near the city of Walbrzych in 1945 – could still be found.

### ...but a ship laden with treasure has been found

The wreck of a Spanish galleon sunk by British forces in 1708 has been discovered off the Colombian coast, according to the nation’s president. The *San Jose* was carrying silver, gold and gems worth at least £662m in modern terms – one of the most valuable cargoes ever lost at sea. The haul had been collected in South America to help fund Philip V’s war of succession against the British.



The *San Jose* (left) meets its match in this 18th-century painting

BRIDGEMAN/NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM



CRIME

# What can Victorian lock-picking contests tell us about web security fears?

**O**nline security is big news in the 21st century, as computer hackers take down prominent websites and work to devise – and crack – ever more nefarious software viruses. Yet, as a new study reveals, the race to develop and defeat these techniques may have a surprising historical precedent: Victorian ‘lock-picking’ competitions.

Such contests pitted manufacturers or workmen from rival brands of lock-makers against each other in a public bid to break one another’s security devices. One of the first examples was at London’s Great Exhibition in 1851, and subsequent bouts were avidly covered in the press. Scenarios often simulated risks faced by users of the product, such as an attack

**A 19th-century padlock created as a challenge to would-be lockpickers. Such contests have online parallels today**



by skilled burglars. Financial incentives were sometimes offered, but the biggest reward – and risk – was the public success or failure of your latest product.

David Churchill from the University of Leeds, whose research into the subject is published in *History Workshop Journal*, argues that these contests have much to tell us about our attitudes to security in the 21st century. “We constantly need to update antivirus software, apparently to keep pace with the latest threats,” he says. “It was the same, in a sense, with lock-picking, and the striving for ever-better lock designs. An even more direct parallel can be made with ‘hack-in’ conferences, in which security experts and hackers join up to discuss security weaknesses and test computer systems in a competitive format.”

Churchill argues that this means we should avoid seeing fears about online security as an entirely novel phenomenon. “The idea that new security is better security – that security must keep up to date – is not nearly as new as we often suppose,” he says. “Early in the 1850s, experts were hopeful that these contests would ultimately produce an ‘unpickable’ lock. But the next two decades saw an acceptance of the need for constant innovation and adaptation to meet new threats.

“Today no one expects a permanently unbreakable security solution, in cyberspace or any other domain,” Churchill says. “So we can trace our modern views of these issues back to the Victorian period.” *ME*

“We constantly need to update antivirus software – and it was the same with lock-picking”

FASHION

# Why the Georgians loved men’s legs

Advertising images of ‘ideal’ bodies sometimes seem to be everywhere – all featuring the requisite flat stomachs and toned muscles. Yet, if you were to travel back to the Georgian era, one part of the body would seem more important – and more idealised – than any other: the leg.

That’s the conclusion of Karen Harvey from the University of Sheffield, who studied a range of sources – from letters and receipts to satire and erotica – to explore the ways in which men’s bodies were viewed in the period. “Men’s legs had been on show in various guises for a long time: we are all familiar with the ‘men in tights’ look of the Tudors,” she says. “But in those outfits only the lower leg was on display: the Georgians gradually exposed more of it, up to and including the man’s pelvis and hips.”

This change can be partly attributed to fashion trends. Yet Harvey argues that it also represented a shift in the way in which people thought about men’s bodies. “There was new emphasis on the shape of the body as a symbol of gender difference,” she says. “Changes in medical knowledge and a rise in the empirical study of the world shifted the focus to the body as the ultimate marker of difference.”

So why the leg? Harvey argues it was the perfect expression of male beauty and power. New, tighter styles showed off the elegant curve of a man’s leg, while its exposure suggested strength. “Men’s social power was being expressed and buoyed up by their physical presence,” Harvey says.

There were downsides, however. “It’s clear that men worried about living up to women’s expectations,” Harvey suggests. And some of the differences in how men and women were objectified continue today. “Whatever body parts are on show, it seems without doubt that male bodies are as objectified as female ones,” says Harvey. “The difference is that male bodies tend to be associated with power and physical force, whereas female bodies are still so often posed as passive beauties.” *ME*





## The historians' view...

# How should we tackle terrorism?

From bombings in the Middle East to murder on the streets of Paris, acts of terror have dominated the headlines in recent months. Two historians offer their personal perspectives on how states should respond to the new wave of mass-casualty attacks sweeping the globe

Interviews by **Chris Bowlby**, a BBC journalist specialising in history

“States have all too often presented terrorists with gifts through their overbearing responses to acts of violence – from Northern Ireland in the 1970s to Al-Qaeda in the 2000s

**PROFESSOR RICHARD ENGLISH**

Terrorism and counter-terrorism existed long before anyone reading this article was born. But the terrorism of contemporary headlines can often eclipse longer memories and deeper understanding, as we focus too narrowly on today's, yesterday's or tomorrow's likely atrocities.

This condemns us to learning afresh things that we should have absorbed long ago. For example, the pattern of misdiagnosing and exaggerating the terrorist threat is often followed by more accurate diagnosis and more effective and proportionate response. One example of this is the UK's experience of the Provisional IRA. The tendency in the early 1970s to dismiss their

acts as purely criminal before launching heavy-handed military responses was replaced by fuller analyses and by subtler, police-led and political approaches.

The resolution of conflicts rarely involves terrorist groups gaining their central objectives. But successful processes do often involve attempts to address the underlying political causes that prompted violence in the first place. In the wake of 9/11, such a transition has had to be learned all over again, it seems. Painfully so. Politicians have repeatedly discovered that they don't possess the power to completely defeat terrorism. After initially promising to rid the world of the terrorist curse, they often come to adopt a more realistic stance of limiting the threat, while recognising its durability.

Our engagement with terrorism's history should involve tactical issues too. Talk of pursuing terrorists' finances in order to hamper their operations has long been seen as a way of monitoring as well as countering non-state terrorist groups. This remains as true of Islamic State as it was of the IRA and the Ulster Defence Association.

And we need to consider the crucial role played by the mutually shaping relationship *between* non-state terrorism and state counter-terrorism (the latter often very violent itself, of course). In the relationship between Israel and its Palestinian adversaries – just as in the acrimonious conflict between the Spanish state and its violent



An Irish tricolour left at a makeshift memorial to the victims of the Paris terror attacks of 13 November 2015. “Politicians have repeatedly had to learn that they don't possess the power to completely defeat terrorism,” says Richard English

Basque opponents in ETA – we see moves by one side shaping, prompting, provoking and limiting the subsequent actions of the other.

Frequently, the motivation behind terrorist involvement lies less in ideological zeal than in a desire to hit back vengefully at an enemy that has struck one's own community. From the Northern Ireland of the 1970s to the Al-Qaeda of the 1990s and 2000s, and now to Islamic State, states have all too often presented their terrorist opponents with gifts through their overbearing responses to acts of terrorism.

None of this makes terrorist violence any less callous, or any more likely to achieve its central, strategic goals. But it *should* shape our responses to each current threat. However, political exigencies and short memories tend sadly to dominate at times of blood-spattered crisis.

History does not provide neat lessons for responding to terrorism. But it does offer clues, and we ignore those at peril to societies and individuals alike.



**Professor Richard English** is director of the Handa Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence at the University of St Andrews





**“In the early 1900s, Britain’s masterful intelligence system monitored anarchists without provoking them into acts of revenge**

**RICHARD BACH JENSEN**

Between the late 1870s and the 1920s, several waves of bombings and assassinations – identified by the media, the public and the authorities as anarchist in origin – terrorised some of the world’s great cities, including Paris, Rome, Barcelona and Buenos Aires.

After the police failed to prevent a series of increasingly powerful dynamite explosions in 1892, one journalist wrote that an “unspeakable panic” had seized Parisians. While the assassination of political leaders is as old as history, what was new was anarchist bombing of cafes, opera performances and religious processions, causing the deaths of hundreds of innocent people.

The authorities were perplexed about how to respond. Individual nation states enforced heavy-handed repression but this often backfired, fuelling anarchist desires for revenge. For example, when the bombing of a religious procession in Barcelona in 1896 killed many women and children, the police, clueless as to the actual perpetrator, arrested hundreds of innocent anarchists, radicals and anti-clericals. Many were tortured in an effort to extract confessions. A military tribunal tried the accused secretly. Five of those convicted were executed, although they were probably innocent.

Rather than ending terrorism in Spain, this over-zealous government response blackened the authorities’ reputation, earned worldwide sympathy for the accused, and inspired an Italian anarchist to assassinate the Spanish prime minister in 1897.

Around the turn of the 20th century, anarchist terrorism became increasingly international, indeed global. Italian anarchists became notorious as Europe’s great assassins, murdering the president of France in 1894, the empress of Austria in 1898, and the king of Italy in 1900.

Calls for international action led, in 1898, to the world’s first anti-terrorism conference in Rome. However, achieving a consensus on



**Sante Geronimo Caserio stabs French president Carnot in 1894, when Europe was gripped by a fear of anarchist terrorism**

what to do between more liberal western European countries and more conservative central, eastern and southern European states proved very difficult.

Despite this, bilateral policing agreements between the European states *did* prove effective in surveilling the anarchists. And most effective of all was probably individual countries’ expansion of intelligence gathering capacities by, among other steps, placing police officers abroad to monitor emigrant communities harbouring anarchists. In this, Italy stood out. Even more important was a push to make Italian politics more liberal and inclusive, providing a safety valve for discontent that might otherwise have escalated into violent acts.

Yet arguably the most successful of all nations at confronting the anarchist challenge was Britain, whose masterful intelligence system monitored resident anarchists without needlessly provoking them into acts of revenge. Its large organised labour movement and comparatively free press also provided plenty of room for the

expression of discontent short of throwing bombs. **H**



**Richard Bach Jensen** is professor of history at the Louisiana Scholars’ College at Northwestern State University

#### DISCOVER MORE

##### BOOKS

- ***Illusions of Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism*** by Richard English (OUP, 2015)
- ***The Battle Against Anarchist Terrorism: An International History, 1878-1934*** (CUP, 2014) by Richard Bach Jensen



**PAST NOTES**  
SKIING**OLD NEWS***An Elephant in the Witness-Box***The Grantham Journal /  
26 July 1879**

**T**here was a highly unusual scene in the Court of the Exchequer late one Friday afternoon, when a young elephant was introduced as a witness in an action for damages against the circus of Bertram and Roberts. The plaintiff, a Miss Thurman, had been standing up in an open-top carriage at the Alexandra Place, a well-known and fashionable entertainment venue, when the sudden appearance of this elephant had frightened the horse. The carriage had suffered a violent jerk and Miss Thurman had been thrown out, landing on the road between the elephant and the horse and leaving her with the painful injury of a broken collar-bone.

Unable, for some reason, to call the horse as a witness, Miss Thurman had settled for the elephant, which, meanwhile, “amused itself by seizing the hats upon the table with its trunk” as it was faced with questions.

News story sourced from *britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk* and rediscovered by

**Fern Riddell.**

Fern regularly appears on BBC Radio 3's *Free Thinking*



ILLUSTRATION BY BEN JONES



A couple pictured with their skis on a Christmas card from c1900

As thousands of Brits jet off to the slopes in search of snow, **Julian Humphrys** gives us the lowdown on the history of skiing

**Who were the first skiers?**

People have been skiing since prehistoric times in northern Europe and Asia. Early skis found in Russian and Swedish bogs are believed to be at least 7,000 years old while petroglyphs (rock art) depicting skiers have been found in Scandinavia, Russia and the Altai Mountains in Mongolia.

**Why did people first ski?**

Throughout history skiing has been used for transport, hunting and warfare. The Altai petroglyphs show hunters on skis chasing cattle and horses while the Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus records the use of skis by Norwegian warriors in the early 13th century. Much later on, battalions of ski-mounted troops were deployed against the Germans in the massive Soviet counter-offensive around Moscow in 1941.

**What about skiing for leisure?**

Skiing as a large-scale leisure activity is a recent phenomenon. The first non-military skiing races were held in Norway in the 1840s. Leisure and competition skiing was initially of the cross-country Nordic variety – with the participant's boot only attached

to the ski at the toe, rapid descents or anything other than the simplest manoeuvres were impossible.

Improved bindings in the mid-19th century led to the birth of downhill Alpine skiing. However, one problem with Alpine skiing was the fact that, after having made a downhill run, the skier had to trudge all the way back up the slope. All that changed in the 1930s when the introduction of a variety of devices including rope pulls and chair lifts (the first introduced in Sun Valley, Idaho in 1936) made Alpine skiing increasingly popular.

**How long has skiing featured in the Winter Olympics?**

Predictably since the very start. Cross country skiing and ski jumping have been a feature of every Winter Olympics since the first at Chamonix in 1924. Alpine skiing made its Winter Olympic debut at Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany in 1936.

**How many Britons go skiing each year?**

Approximately 1.2 million.

**How many skiing medals have Brits won at the Winter Olympics?**

None. **II**



# CITY OF SPIES

## Cold War Berlin

### HISTORICAL TRIPS

THE HISTORY THAT SHAPED US

#### *The defining city of the Cold War...*

- Guided tour of Berlin city centre in iconic East German Trabants.
- Dinner at the top of Alexanderplatz TV tower, focal point of the former GDR.
- Private tour of Tempelhof Airport, the hub of the Berlin Airlift.

#### GUIDED BY

*Roger Moorhouse is a historian and author, specialising in the history of World War II.*



**T**here are few cities that have as rich a history as Berlin. There are surely none as important in the period that followed the Second World War. For forty years, Berlin was the epicentre of world politics - from the Airlift of 1948 to the Berlin Wall's historic demise a generation ago.

**“All free men, wherever they may live, are citizens of Berlin, and therefore, as a free man, I take pride in the words, Ich bin ein Berliner.”**

JOHN F KENNEDY  
26th June, 1963

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# LETTERS

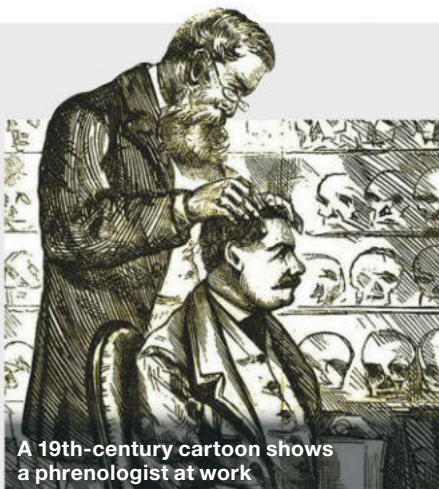
## Georgian head case

LETTER  
OF THE  
MONTH

I read your article on phrenology with some interest (*All in the Head*, Christmas). Not all phrenology for assessing criminals was used for reform purposes. Your readers may like to know the story of Lamartine Griffin Hardman who was the governor of Georgia, 1927–31.

Hardman believed in phrenology to the point that he visited a condemned man to 'read his bumps' before providing a fatal decision on his final appeal to the governor. In another case, Hardman denied an appeal after viewing the photographs of two men awaiting electrocution.

**Robert N Smith**, author of *An Evil Day in Georgia*, Tyne & Wear



A 19th-century cartoon shows a phrenologist at work

● We reward the letter of the month writer with our 'History Choice' book of the month. This issue it is *Final Solution: The Fate of the Jews, 1933–1949* by David Cesarani. Read the review on page 69



when Virgil Earp, the town marshal of Tombstone – aided by his brothers and Doc Holliday – attempted to enforce the town ordinance prohibiting the carrying of arms. Perhaps the National Rifle Association will seek to rehabilitate the Clanton McLaury gang as the Tombstone Martyrs.

**Andrew Hudson**, Cumbria

## Ace of the First World War

Bryan Samain (*Letters*, Christmas) writes of Major James McCudden being the most decorated British flyer in the First World War, but even with 52 victories he was not the most successful. When I was researching the amazing career of our only wooden-legged fighter pilot of the war, Sydney 'Timbertoes' Carlin, it became clear that this honour belonged to another VC, Edward 'Mick' Mannock, who was a flight commander in 74 Squadron when Carlin briefly came under his command.

Mannock was eventually credited with 73 victories but might have officially recorded more as he always used to guide novice pilots into their first battles, some of whose initial victories were believed to have more properly belonged to 'Mick'.

McCudden, Mannock, 'Billy' Bishop and a small group of other valiant men set the standard for later generations of fighter pilots to follow, and let us hope, when the RAF celebrates its centenary in 2018, the general public will be fully enabled to admire the selfless skill and courage of these pioneer air warriors.

**Don Chester**, North Ferriby

## Henry V's reign of terror

I enjoyed reading Robert Hardy's article about Henry V (*My History Hero*, Christmas). From the safe distance of 600 years, Henry's undisputed bravery, piety and intelligence engender veneration of the man. The Shakespeare play certainly helps.

However I suspect that the choice of Henry as a history hero would not have

## A note on notation

I was interested in Dr William Flynn's introduction to the origins of musical notation (*Miscellany*, Christmas). He devoted less attention to the second part of the question: why notation as we know it was developed. Fortunately, we know the answer, because the man credited with inventing stave notation, Guido d'Arezzo, explained his motivations in writings that still survive.

Guido was a monk. As a child, he had memorised the repertoire of melodies that medieval clerics needed for the divine office with only basic notation to help, and he knew first-hand how difficult this process was. He wrote that monks were wasting time – which could be better spent on prayer – memorising music, or, worse still, arguing about whose version of each melody was better.

Guido's system of notation meant that monks no longer needed to memorise music. It allowed boys to start learning new pieces in a matter of days, and to sing in perfect ensemble. Guido's writings explain the purpose of his innovations: he believed that his efforts for the church's sake would earn God's mercy and prayers for his soul by grateful successors, both of which

would secure his salvation.

As a PhD researcher in music history, I was pleasantly surprised to see a discussion of music in *BBC History Magazine*. In my view, historians don't listen to musicologists often enough: they often treat music cursorily, if at all. It's time music was recognised as a vital source of historical evidence that can't be ignored.

**Daisy Gibbs**, Windermere

## Crime fighters

In the article *What Are the Real Issues in the US Gun Control Debate?* (Christmas), the authors didn't discuss the fact that gun control is nothing new in America. Many cow towns in the American west had prohibitions on carrying firearms. Bat Masterson and Wyatt Earp required people entering Dodge City to surrender their arms until they left and managed to keep the murder rate down.

The legendary gunfight at the OK Corral occurred



**Burt Lancaster (left) and Kirk Douglas star as Wyatt Earp and Doc Holliday in the 1957 film *Gunfight at the OK Corral***





A c1484 depiction of the battle of Agincourt. Our reader Stephen Gadd is less than impressed by Henry V's conduct during the Hundred Years' War

been shared by several contemporaries including: Sir John Oldcastle (Shakespeare's Falstaff) and numerous followers of Wycliffe who were executed in a spectacularly vindictive campaign of religious repression; the majority of his army in his 1415 campaign, whose lives Henry squandered in the botched Harfleur siege and the subsequent death-march to Calais; the French prisoners of war he had massacred at Agincourt; and the thousands of women and children he left to starve to death in ditches outside Rouen in 1418.

Henry's obsession with obtaining the French crown allied with luck and his crafty exploitation of the divisions in the French hierarchy ultimately led to the impossibly unworkable settlement at Troyes. The consequences of Troyes include the total defeat of the English in France, the Wars of the Roses, the collapse of Henry's short-lived dynasty, and the financial ruin and deaths of thousands of his subjects.

Henry's short-lived success had already started to unravel by the time he succumbed to dysentery following the catastrophic English defeat at Bauge the previous year. Had he not died young then surely defeat in war and financial, religious and political difficulties at home would have led him to share the

same fate as his son?  
**Stephen Gadd, Crawley**

### More new year's resolutions

Here are some more new year's resolutions that you could have included in your January issue (*The New Year's Resolutions They Should Have Made...*):

- William Rufus (1100): "I won't go hunting in the New Forest this year"
- Charles VI (1415): "I'll just ignore that miserable little English army at Agincourt"
- Catherine Howard (1540): "I'll be less friendly with the lads at court"
- Philip II (1588): "I'll keep my Cadiz fleet at home this year"
- Earl of Essex (1601): "I'll spend today reading and send everyone else home"
- Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette (1789): "Let's really give the people some cakes to eat."

**David L Young, Jerusalem**

### WRITE TO US

We welcome your letters, while reserving the right to edit them. We may publish your letters on our website. Please include a daytime phone number and, if emailing, a postal address (not for publication). Letters should be no longer than 250 words.

**email:** letters@historyextra.com

**Post:** Letters, BBC History Magazine, Immediate Media Company Bristol Ltd, Tower House, Fairfax Street, Bristol BS1 3BN

## SOCIAL MEDIA

What you've been saying on Twitter and Facebook



**@HistoryExtra: Hitler's *Mein Kampf* is on sale in Germany for the first time in 70 years. What's your reaction?**

**@chrisasabutton** Good move. Banning these books just makes them more appealing to some

**@glintingframe** Important to demystify such a text by actually reading it, and thus revealing it as drivel. Should help to lance the boil

**Aris Panagiotopoulos** Banning books is what totalitarian regimes do. In a democracy every opinion, however extreme it may seem, must and should be heard. This book is part of history and history should not be tampered with

**Philip L Meers** By publishing *Mein Kampf* the majority will see it for what it is: a badly written rant. On the whole I expect most people will find it boring and not as they expected

**Paula Yablonsky** As a Jew I have strong feelings about this book and its author. Should it be banished from history? No. If we don't remember lessons learned, we are doomed to repeat them

**Terence Ford-williams** It's a good, interesting read! I don't agree with its content, but it's fascinating to get into the head of one of the 20th century's most enigmatic people

**Nicola Jacob** The worst thing would be to let this book's message of hate be forgotten. It reminds us all where prejudice and intolerance can lead

**John Nicholls** Evil must be seen and understood in order to reject it. Banning books equals burning books. Ideas, for better or worse, cannot be destroyed so easily

**@HistoryExtra: Simon Schama, Mary Beard and David Olusoga will present a new BBC art series. What do you hope to see in it?**

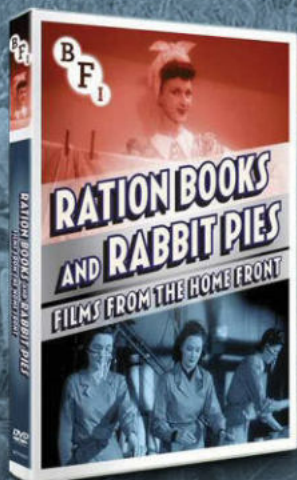
**Suzannah Lipscomb** I trust the historical expertise, artistic vision and sheer presenting talent of this dream-team to show me things I do not yet know that I want to know

**Carol Slifka McMichael** Please show the subtle development in ENGLISH Art from medieval to Renaissance

**Cathy Barnes** More about the struggle of female artists through history... Recognition and other pressures etc



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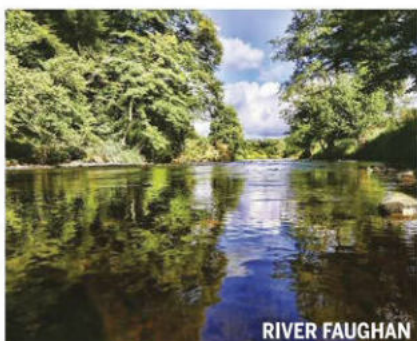
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The location of each Centenary Wood was carefully chosen because of its heritage connections. Be part of this tribute by dedicating a tree in a wood of your choice, creating a lasting memorial to those who sacrificed so much during that conflict.



RIVER FAUGHAN

IMAGE: WTM/T DORMAN

### ADVERTISEMENT FEATURE

#### CENTENARY WOODS LOCATIONS



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In the heart of the Faughan Valley in County Londonderry sits 53 acres of open grassland, renowned for its natural beauty – the perfect location for Ireland's Centenary Wood.

The people of Ireland sacrificed so much during the First World War, so to pay tribute to the 40,000 men who gave their lives during the conflict, the Woodland Trust will be planting 40,000 native trees at the site.

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Additionally, as a special place for reflection, a small arboretum of 40 standard trees will be planted as a lasting tribute. This plan looks set to cost £700,000.

### Get involved

Find out more and test your wartime knowledge in our heritage quiz, and to be entered into our free prize draw at [centenarywoods.org.uk](http://centenarywoods.org.uk) or show your support with a donation by calling **0800 915 1914** (quoting **F15FWW018**).







Michael Wood on... **the new *Civilisation***

## “It’s a great moment to be looking at the world’s artistic heritage”

“So the BBC is to go ahead with a remake of *Civilisation*, the landmark 1969 arts series written and presented by Lord Clark. I have always believed in the corporation’s public service mission to “inform, educate and entertain”, and with the current threats to the BBC’s budget, and even to its ethos, it is vital that such projects – serious explorations of ideas in the humanities – are still undertaken. Commissioned by the then controller of BBC Two, David Attenborough (who came up with the title, about which Clark himself had misgivings), the series was one of the first to be shot in 35mm colour and had an impact out of all proportion to its audience size.

Clark’s voice, I have to say, was too patrician to my student generation (which incidentally he dismissed as misguided following the Paris riots). Beautifully as it was shot, and lapidary as were his words, for us it was John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing* a couple of years later, that captured our imaginations, changing the way we thought, which Clark didn’t, for all his affecting belief in the humanistic tradition of Europe after the disasters of the 20th century (he had lived through both world wars).

This seems to me a pointer for the planners of the new *Civilisation*. I am sure they have already thought long and hard about it, but having spent half a lifetime filming and travelling in non-western civilisations, I would simply say that it should not just be a remake, but a total rethink. It should ask questions and make us think afresh, questioning our own preconceptions. And that perforce means taking a view about history. For the arts are made by history, and derive their meaning from it.

Clark’s definition of civilisation was western: Italy, France and northern Europe; the glories and wild profusions of Spanish art, for example, were left out. But as he said, it was “a personal view”. (As too was Ernst Gombrich’s earlier *Story of Art* – this bestselling art book of all time had nothing at all on India!)

That pinpoints the issue for makers of the new series of *Civilisation*. What’s the point of view? And how do we define civilisation? It’s a problematical word these days

with connotations of racial and cultural superiority, as when western politicians in recent wars spoke of “the civilised world” when they meant their own liberal democracies. Does it just mean high culture? Sappho, Su Song and Mozart? Or perhaps it’s helpful to adopt the definition used by archaeologists and historians, namely a material one – ‘life in cities’ – beginning with large-scale societies in the near east and the Indus valley, later in China and the Americas. Its common markers are virtually universal: cities, writing, bronze technology, large ceremonial buildings, monumental art, hierarchies and class division, all sanctioned by some form of law and held together by coercive force.

Within similar material conditions, the high civilisations in history developed a wide range of conceptions of civilisation, of which the arts are a core expression. And for me, that’s the key. Civilisation means the history of the world now, and the series should reflect that. Of the world’s more than 7 billion people, over a fifth live in the Indian subcontinent and nearly a fifth in China; a fifth too are Muslims. These regions gave birth to the oldest artistic traditions in the world, and it seems to me that any view of civilisation today must situate its ways of seeing away from Clark’s vision; not only to see the distinctiveness of other cultures, but the limitations of western meanings, western ways of seeing. As the Sinologist Simon Leys said, only by looking at China can we see what pertains to the values of universal humanity and what is merely western idiosyncrasy.

So let’s hope the new *Civilisation* is a resounding success: it’s a fascinating project, but also a responsibility. One hopes the programme-makers will also give us the voices of experts in India, Africa, China and the Muslim world, and those of makers and consumers of art in the many places where art is not a commodity but still an expression of belief. As it was in 1969, it’s a great moment to be looking at the world’s artistic and creative heritage, and, as in 1969, it’s a great opportunity to make a statement. This time let it be for the world. ■

.....  
**Michael Wood**  
is professor of public history at the University of Manchester. His new TV series, *The Story of China*, airs from 28 January



ILLUSTRATION BY LYNN HATZIUS

COVER STORY

---

# HENRY IV THE USURPER KING

Henry IV may be best known for seizing the throne from his cousin Richard II. Yet, says his latest biographer **Chris Given-Wilson**, Henry's greatest feat wasn't grabbing power but holding on to it

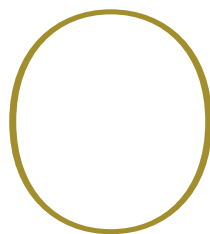
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A 17th-century portrait of Henry IV. English earls, Scottish kings, French dukes and a Welsh prince all tried to unseat him. Yet this most resilient of medieval monarchs prevailed over them all





n 30 June 1399, Henry of Bolingbroke stepped ashore at Ravenspur on the Humber, ostensibly to recover his inheritance. It was a daring move, for just nine months earlier, Henry

had been banished from England by his cousin King Richard II. Then, in March 1399, Richard had seized the great Lancastrian duchy from under Henry's nose following the death of the latter's father, John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster. When Richard unwisely sailed to Ireland in May, Henry seized his chance with characteristic boldness.

No army of invasion accompanied him, just a handful of servants and fellow exiles. Barely had Henry landed, however, when Lancastrian retainers and disaffected nobles, chafing under Richard's predatory rule, flocked to his banner, while support for the king evaporated. Returning from Ireland, Richard was cornered at Flint Castle in north Wales, where on 16 August the cousins met. Jean Creton, a valet, in Richard's service, recorded their conversation: "My lord," said Henry, "I have come sooner than you sent for me, and I shall tell you why: it is commonly said among your people that you have, for the last 22 years, governed them very badly and far too harshly. If it please Our Lord, however, I shall now help you to govern them better."

Yet whatever Henry claimed, he knew that if Richard was permitted to retain power he would sooner or later exact revenge for his humiliation. So it was as Henry's prisoner that the king was escorted to London, where on 30 September he was deposed. On 13 October, Henry of Bolingbroke was crowned Henry IV.

## Betrayed and lynched

Yet winning a kingdom proved easier than keeping it. For a start, although Richard was childless, Henry was not his primogenitary heir. That right belonged to the eight-year-old Earl of March, great-grandson of Gaunt's elder brother, Lionel of Clarence, albeit through a female line. Henry's descent through a direct male line undoubtedly strengthened his claim, but there were many who regarded Lancastrian kingship as illegitimate, and hence a justifiable cause for rebellion.

The first attempt to unseat Henry – the Epiphany Rising – came just three months after his coronation, when the Earls of Kent, Huntingdon and Salisbury devised a plot to ambush him and his sons at Windsor. Although they were betrayed and lynched, and some 40 of their followers beheaded, it was clear that the former king was too dangerous to be allowed to live, and within another month Richard was dead. It was put



**Capital gain** Henry Bolingbroke enters London in triumph in 1399. Yet the honeymoon period would soon be over

"The French addressed the new king as **Henry of Lancaster, despoiler and wrongfully ruler** of the kingdom of England"

about that he had starved himself to death "of melancholy", but in fact he was almost certainly murdered on Henry's orders.

Nevertheless, the cry of regicide was little heard in England. Instead, it was rumours that Richard was still alive and would return to claim his kingdom that plagued Henry for the next few years. Scotland, where a pseudo-Richard called the Mammet ('puppet') was maintained for several years at the court of King Robert III, was the origin of this fable. But it was chiefly English friars who disseminated it, for which nearly a dozen Franciscans were hanged at Tyburn in June 1402.

Far more dangerous was the rebellion of the Percys in 1403. Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland, his brother Thomas, Earl of Worcester, and his son 'Hotspur' had been instrumental in Henry's triumph in 1399, but by 1403 they were disillusioned with the king's policies in Scotland and Wales, and their influence was waning. Declaring that "unless King Richard is still alive", the Earl of March was rightfully king, they raised an army and met Henry in battle at Shrewsbury on 21 July. It was a bloody, hard-fought affair, but eventually the king prevailed: Hotspur was killed, Worcester beheaded, and Northumberland –

who missed the battle and claimed ignorance of the plot – stripped of the lands and offices he had acquired since 1399.

Yet although Henry gave Northumberland the benefit of the doubt in 1403, he never trusted him again, and two years later the earl rebelled once more. His accomplice was Richard Scrope, archbishop of York, whose sermons against the king's heavy taxation and "evil counsellors" struck such a chord that he soon found himself at the head of an 'army' of several thousand clerics, citizens and malcontents. Arrested and brought before the king, he was convicted of treason and beheaded outside the walls of his city. Never before had an English king dared to execute a bishop, but it was Henry's way of signalling that enough was enough, and in a sense it worked. The spate of domestic rebellions now abated.

Northumberland and his ally Lord Bardolf fled to Scotland. In February 1408 they again tried to topple Henry, but were defeated and killed near Tadcaster.

## Welsh woes

English dissidents apart, the most serious threat Henry faced was from the Welsh. Fourteenth-century Wales was largely quiescent under English rule, but in September 1400 Owain Glyndŵr, a descendant of native Welsh princes, declared himself Prince of Wales and began devastating English-held towns and estates.

The revolt spread rapidly. Legislation imposing virtual apartheid in Wales only exacerbated the situation and, by 1405, large parts of Wales were under Welsh control.

Here, as in England, Henry's usurpation was used to justify rebellion. The greatest Anglo-Welsh landholder to defect was Edmund Mortimer, uncle of the Earl of March, who was incensed at his nephew's treatment. In 1406 he, Glyndŵr and Northumberland drafted the Tripartite Indenture, whereby they agreed to partition England and Wales between them once they had destroyed the Lancastrian 'imposter'.

The early years of Henry's reign also witnessed an upsurge of Anglo-Scottish hostilities, not least because Robert III persisted in addressing Henry as 'steward of England'. When English ambassadors suggested at a peace conference in 1401 that the two nations submit their differences to arbitration, the bishop of Glasgow inquired – in "very undiplomatic language" – whether Henry would also care to submit his claim to the English throne to arbitration. Although Scottish wings were severely clipped by their defeat at the battle of Hamilton Hill in Northumberland in 1402, they remained reluctant to acknowledge Henry's kingship.

The French found Richard II's deposi-



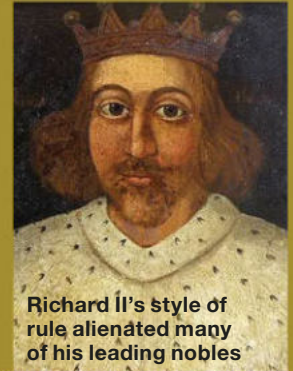
# The adventures of Henry IV



**Henry is born at Bolingbroke Castle,** in Lincolnshire (pictured), son of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, and Duchess Blanche.

15 April 1367

**Henry is one of the five 'Appellants' who oppose Richard II.** They defeat a royalist force at the battle of Radcot Bridge and purge the court in the Merciless Parliament.



Richard II's style of rule alienated many of his leading nobles

1387-88

**Richard II exiles Henry and the Duke of Norfolk** following accusations of treason. Henry spends the next nine months in Paris.

1390-93

Henry goes on crusade to Prussia and on **pilgrimage to the Holy Land**, thereby winning a reputation for chivalry and militant piety.

October 1398

**Henry returns to England,** captures and deposes Richard II, and is crowned king on 13 October.

1399

**Henry defeats an army led by Harry Hotspur and the Earl of Worcester** at the battle of Shrewsbury.



The statue of the doomed Harry Hotspur at Alnwick

21 July 1403

**Henry suppresses a rebellion led by the Earl of Northumberland and the archbishop of York.** The archbishop is beheaded and the earl flees to Scotland.

June 1405



Henry Bolingbroke is crowned king of England in an illumination from *Froissart's Chronicles*

June 1408

**Henry is taken seriously ill,** probably with a heart attack. His health remains precarious for the rest of his life, and his energy declines.

1410-11

**Prince Henry (left), the heir to the throne, assumes power for nearly two years,** from January 1410 until the king reasserts his authority in November 1411.



**Henry IV dies** in the Jerusalem Chamber of Westminster Abbey, after collapsing while visiting the shrine of Edward the Confessor.

The tomb of Henry IV and his wife, Joan of Navarre, in Canterbury Cathedral

20 March 1413





**Kissing the bride** French king Charles VI (above, third left) was furious when Henry Bolingbroke deposed Richard II – shown here with his new wife, Isabelle, Charles's daughter



**Cousins at war** Henry Bolingbroke (on horseback) confronts King Richard II at Flint Castle in north Wales. Henry would get the better of their encounter, escorting Richard into captivity in London and having himself crowned king

tion even harder to swallow, for he had been married to their 10-year-old princess Isabelle. This 'lamb among wolves' evoked a storm of outrage in Paris. With King Charles VI periodically insane, it fell to his brother Louis, Duke of Orléans, to act as Isabella's avenger, a role he relished: "Where is King Richard?" he wrote to Henry in 1403: "Does not God know? Does not the world know? If he is alive, then let him go free; and if he is dead, then it was you who did it."

Between 1402 and 1407, Orléans repeatedly sponsored privateers to prey on English shipping, launched raids on English ports, and invaded Guyenne, the English-held duchy in south-western France. Only after his assassination in November 1407 by agents of the Duke of Burgundy did the onslaught relent and the French could bring themselves to address "Henry, king of England", rather than "Henry of Lancaster, despoiler and wrongfully ruler of the kingdom of England".

## The spoils of victory

Beset from every quarter, how did Henry respond? Initially he tried conciliation, pardoning several of Richard II's chief cronies and retaining many of his lesser supporters. But Lancastrian stalwarts resented this, expecting the spoils of victory to come to them. It was, after all, the Lancastrian affinity that had won Henry the throne. Richard II

"Henry IV saw off his enemies and founded a dynasty that lasted 50 years. **As his contemporaries noted, he never lost a battle**"

had feared John of Gaunt's retainers, with their military might, their local influence in the Midlands and the north, and their conspicuous livery collars of interlocking essces, "through which", declared one chronicler, "they thought they could gain riches before heaven and earth".

It was to counterbalance John's power that Richard built up his own retinue of knights and esquires, distributed his white hart livery badges in the 1390s, and exiled Henry. But the Lancastrian affinity, built up over decades and rooted in local traditions of service, was resilient. Now its time had come.

The real question facing Henry was the degree to which he could broaden his sup-

port without jeopardising the security of his regime. Could he truly be "a king for all his people", as he claimed to be, or would he continue to be seen as the leader of a faction? To some extent, the decision was made for him, for his initial moves towards conciliation backfired. It was men whose lives he had spared who spearheaded the Epiphany Rising, following which the royal household was militarised, local power vested in those with unimpeachable Lancastrian credentials, and the royal family elevated to an increasingly dominant position.

After the battle of Shrewsbury, Henry's reliance on his family and retainers deepened. Treason and rebellion were suppressed mercilessly, while parliament came to resemble a Lancastrian party conference. The unease at this was palpable. War, rebellion and the price of allegiance bankrupted the government, but when Henry begged parliament for money in 1404, the usually supportive Thomas Arundel, archbishop of Canterbury, rounded on the royal retainers. It was they, he declared, who "grew proud and rich" on the proceeds of taxation, while "the king is in penury".

Politically, too, the royal retainers' influence over Henry was seen as excessive. It was "those standing around the king" who would brook no pardon for Archbishop Scrope in 1405. It was "the king's friends" who insisted that Thomas Percy be executed, despite





**The king is dead** A 15th-century depiction of Richard II's funeral. It was claimed that he had died of "melancholy", but few doubted that Henry IV had ordered Richard's murder

Henry's wish to spare his life. True or not, such accusations add up to a perception that Henry was as much the prisoner as the master of his affinity.

### Law breaks down

After 1406, as Henry's health deteriorated, gentry hitherto excluded from power in the Midlands and the north hit back, attacking royal ministers and devastating crown lands. In counties such as Shropshire, Staffordshire and Northumberland, law and order broke down, and it was left to the future Henry V, whose ties to the Lancastrian old guard were less binding, to attempt to restore order.

Nevertheless, the last years of the reign saw stability. France's slide into civil war following Orléans' assassination, the capture of the Scottish prince James I in 1406, the death of Northumberland in 1408 and the effective end of the Welsh revolt by 1409 brought financial recovery.

Yet, paradoxically, this security created new disagreements, especially the question of which side to support in France. In 1411, when Prince Henry controlled the government (while his father was indisposed with illness), he sent an English force to help the Burgundians. But in 1412, after the king had regained power the previous year, he despatched his second son, Thomas, to help the Burgundians' opponents, the Armagnacs.

Prince Henry was furious. He did not have long to wait to regain power, however, for his father was by now desperately ill. Henry IV died on 20 March 1413, after collapsing in Westminster Abbey, and was buried in Canterbury Cathedral, as he had requested.

Due partly to Shakespeare, it is his usurpation that has defined his reputation, but it is worth remembering that he also rescued England from Richard II's despotism, saw off each of his enemies in turn, and founded a dynasty that would rule for more than 50 years. His martial reputation was second to none: as contemporaries noted, he never lost a battle.

Henry's misfortune was to fall ill just at the moment when he had won his regime a measure of security. Had he lived longer, he might have achieved much more, for Henry was well suited to kingship: steely and resourceful, he kept his friends close and his enemies afraid. On the scale of the possible for a usurper, his achievement ranks high. **H**

Chris Given-Wilson is professor emeritus in the School of History at the University of St Andrews

### DISCOVER MORE

#### BOOK

► **Henry IV (The Yale English Monarchs Series)** by Chris Given-Wilson (Yale University Press, 2016)

## A reign of pain

From "festering of the flesh" to a prolapsed rectum, Henry IV was blighted by poor health

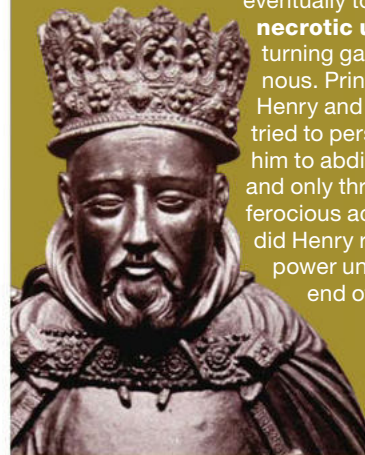
Henry IV suffered from at least three medical conditions. In 1387, aged 20, he was afflicted by the **pox**, the first evidence of the skin condition – perhaps **psoriasis** – that would resurface in 1399 and 1405 and later severely disfigure him. Some contemporaries wrongly attributed this to leprosy as a punishment for the execution of Archbishop Scrope.

In April 1406 he wrote from Windsor informing the council that "an illness has suddenly affected us in our leg", causing him such pain that his physicians had advised him not to travel. This was probably a euphemism for the **prolapsed rectum** of which he was cured with a treatment devised by the physician John of Arderne. This involved applying an ointment called *unguentum apostolorum* to the rectum, whereupon, it was claimed, the protrusion "shall enter in again".

Towards the end of June 1408, when he was 41, Henry (shown below in the most authentic likeness we have of him) collapsed with what was probably a **coronary thrombosis**. He recovered, but a relapse six months later was almost fatal. On 21 January 1409 he made his will, but again he recovered. For the rest of his life, however, his health remained precarious, and by early 1412 he could no longer walk or ride without pain. Chroniclers described him as "all sinews and bones", or "cruelly tormented with festering of the flesh, dehydration of the eyes and rupture of the internal organs". His body, said one, was "completely shrunk and wasted by disease... his flesh and skin eaten away, all his innards laid open and visible".

Such putrefaction was probably the result of blocked arteries cutting off the blood supply to parts of his body, leading eventually to

**necrotic ulcers** turning gangrenous. Prince Henry and others tried to persuade him to abdicate, and only through a ferocious act of will did Henry retain power until the end of his life.





# The one-wom

As Hillary Clinton seeks to become the next occupant of the Oval Office, **Jad Adams** tells the story of the free-love activist Victoria Woodhull, who in 1872 launched an audacious bid to become America's first female president

**O**n the evening of Tuesday 5 November 1872, the first female candidate for president of the United States was not waiting at party headquarters for the election results, she was in prison in New York City on obscenity charges.

Victoria Woodhull – clairvoyant, entrepreneur, women's rights campaigner and free-love advocate – experienced plenty of ups and downs in her long life. But the few weeks she spent languishing in Ludlow Street Jail as America went to the polls almost certainly counts as the nadir.


Six months earlier, when Woodhull had taken the stage at a gathering of the Equal Rights Party – a radical organisation she had herself founded – it was political power not imprisonment that beckoned. “A revolution shall sweep over the whole country, to purge it of political trickery, despotic assumption, and all industrial injustice,” she declared. So moved was her audience by her words that it promptly nominated her for president in the forthcoming elections. In a nation in which women had few political rights, this was a truly extraordinary move. Unfortunately for Woodhull, it was one that America's all-male electorate regarded with little more than horror or amusement.

Victoria Woodhull's bumpy ride to trailblazing presidential nominee began in 1838, when she was born Victoria Claflin in Homer, Ohio. From early in life, she participated in the family business of travelling to fairgrounds, selling patent medicines, giving demonstrations of clairvoyance, summoning spirit music and conducting séances.

At 15 she married an alcoholic doctor called Woodhull, but the union was short-lived – and it was from a lover, Colonel James

Blood, that Victoria learned the new doctrine of women's rights. It was a brand of radicalism that she embraced with gusto. Soon, she was championing labour reform and ‘free love’ – the right to have sex whenever one felt like it, with whomever one pleased, regardless of marital status.

Woodhull's fortunes surged in 1868 when she moved to New York – at the bidding, she claimed, of her spirit guide. There she met Cornelius Vanderbilt, probably America's richest man. She discovered a



Victoria Woodhull, pictured in c1872, single-handedly revitalised the votes-for-women campaign in the USA



# an revolution

natural talent for dealing in stocks and shares – and in 1870, with Vanderbilt's backing, she and her sister Tennessee set up America's first ever brokerage office run by women. Woodhull, Claflin & Co quickly gained a reputation as the 'queens of finance' and, in search of maximum exposure, launched a newspaper, *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly*, in May 1870.

All the while, Woodhull's passion for women's rights remain undimmed. She began arguing that, as the American constitution did not forbid women from voting, then they had the right to do so – and managed to persuade a congressman to invite her to Washington DC to put that case. On her arrival, she presented a petition on the citizenship of women to the Senate and the House of Representatives, before addressing the House Judiciary Committee in 1871. In doing so, she single-handedly revitalised the votes-for-women debate.

## Collision course

Woodhull had swiftly become one of the most important campaigning women in the US. Yet, as she was about to discover, her high-profile activism had set her on a collision course with the more reactionary elements of a deeply conservative nation.

Soon after her dramatic entry into the presidential race, the boarding house where Woodhull was staying asked her to leave because of her radical views. She then moved to her office in the brokerage firm – only for the owner to increase the rent by £1,000 dollars a year, payable immediately.

Woodhull was convinced that her enemies were orchestrating a conspiracy against her, and decided to hit back where it hurt. So she went about exposing the private lives of the leaders of two high-profile women's suffrage organisations – with whom she'd long been at loggerheads, believing them fusty and staid.

**“Woodhull was thrown into jail, which is where she languished on election day”**



Victoria Woodhull argues the case for women's suffrage before the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives in 1871. Many Americans were horrified by her radical ideas

Woodhull could hardly have tread on more explosive territory if she'd tried. That's because Reverend Henry Ward Beecher, the president of the American Woman Suffrage Association (and the most famous preacher in the US), was having an affair with Lib, wife of Theodore Tilton, head of the National Woman's Suffrage Association.

This was known to the female leaders of the suffrage organisations, but they thought discretion the best path and advised Tilton to keep quiet. All the while, Beecher thundered from the pulpit about marriage's sanctity and the sinfulness of sex outside of it.

His hypocrisy was laid bare when Woodhull produced a special edition of *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly* telling the full story of the Beecher-Tilton scandal. It was a publishing sensation – and when distributors refused to handle it, news vendors stormed Woodhull's office to obtain copies.

The publication soon came to the attention of Anthony Comstock, a dry-goods salesman and self-appointed guardian of public morals. So appalled was he by Woodhull's revelations, he sought a warrant for the sisters' arrest for sending indecent material through the mail. Victoria and Tennessee were thrown into jail, which is where they languished on the day of the presidential

election in 1872. They were found not guilty of the allegations, yet all the political momentum they'd built up had been lost. (The number of votes Woodhull received was negligible, and is not recorded).

But a spell in prison hadn't taken the fight out of Woodhull – far from it. In 1877, Victoria and Tennessee emigrated to England, where they made brilliant marriages: Tennessee became Lady Cook while Victoria married a wealthy banker, and was feted in newspapers in her later years as “The United States Mother of Women's Suffrage”.

Woodhull spent her time in England publishing a journal, *Humanitarian*, and promoting planned parenthood and eugenics. The US's first female presidential candidate died thousands of miles away from the seat of American power on her estate at Bredon's Norton, Worcestershire, in 1927. **II**

Jad Adams is a historian of radicalism and nationalism. His most recent book is *Women and the Vote: A World History* (OUP, 2014)

## DISCOVER MORE

### BOOK

► **The Scarlet Sisters: Sex, Suffrage, and Scandal in the Gilded Age** by Myra MacPherson (Twelve, 2015)



# The *Dad's Army* to defending Britain

Thanks to the famous BBC series, which has inspired a new comedy film, the image of 'Dad's Army' as a group of bumbling misfits has been burned into the British consciousness. Yet, in reality, the Home Guard was a tough, dynamic fighting force. **Leo McKinstry** reveals five ways in which it readied itself to repel a Nazi invasion



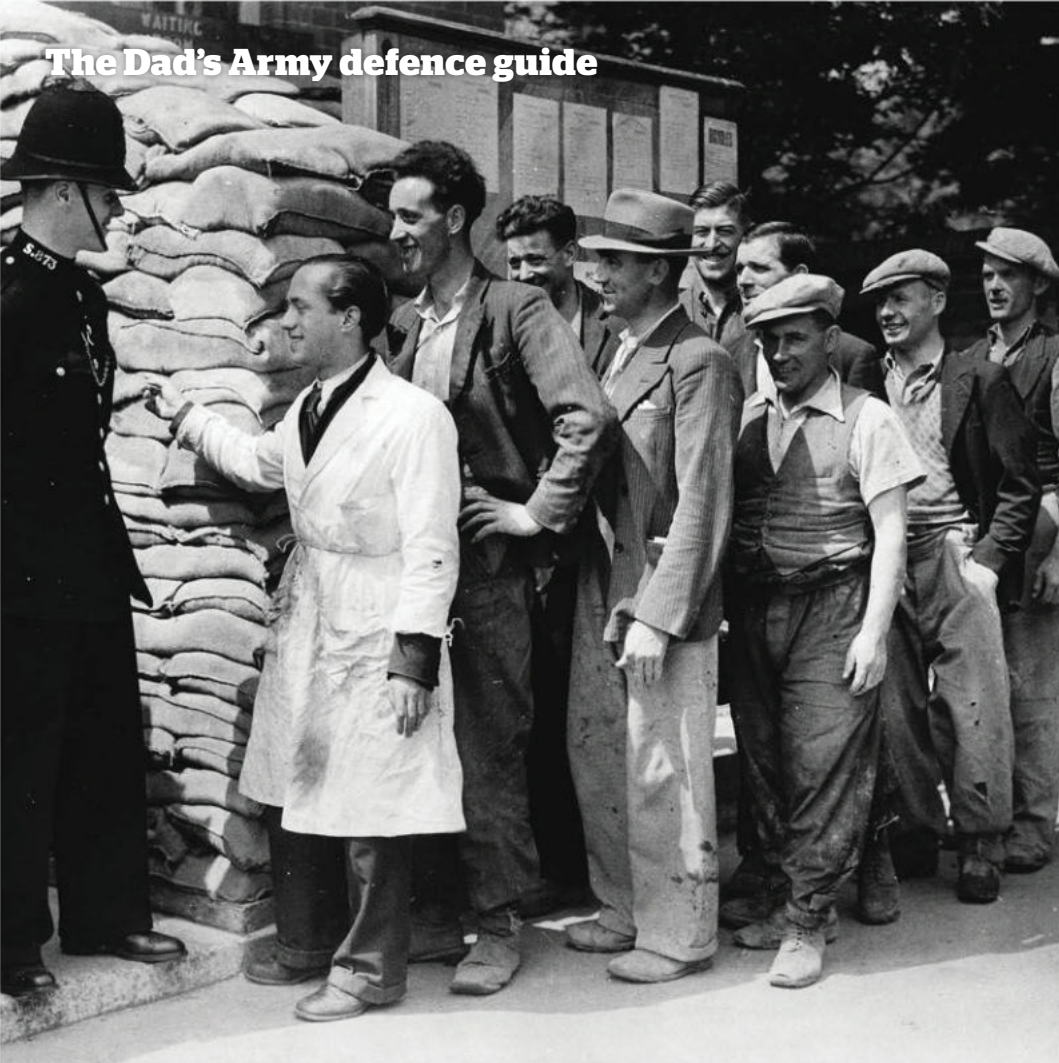
# Army guide

## ain

A member of the Local Defence Volunteers (the original name of the Home Guard) practises marksmanship in June 1940. According to one former Home Guardsman, German invaders "would never have had an inch they wouldn't have had to fight over"







A policeman looks on as men queue to enlist for voluntary duty with the Home Guard, c1940. Half of all volunteers to 'Dad's Army' were under 27

## 1 Recruit young, athletic men

Far from being a laughable, marginalised organisation, the Home Guard actually reflected the public mood of resolute defiance against Nazi Germany.

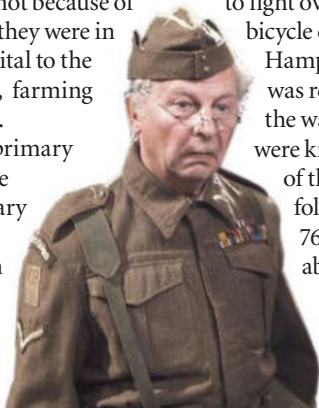
On 14 May 1940, when the war secretary Anthony Eden broadcast his call for men to join the new force, initially known as the Local Defence Volunteers, the response was overwhelming. Within seven days, 250,000 men had registered. By the end of July, the total had climbed to 1,456,000.

Contrary to the *Dad's Army* myth (which has it that recruitment was dominated by elderly men like Corporal Jones, below), half of the volunteers were under 27. Most of these men were barred from military service, not because of unfitness, but because they were in reserved occupations vital to the war effort, like mining, farming or civil administration.

The Home Guard's primary task in 1940 would have been to act as a secondary line of defence against German landings from

the air or by sea along the southern and eastern coasts. Other duties, like guarding installations or enforcing curfews, were not without some comic moments. It's said that one Home Guardsman, having spied an amorous couple in a car that was illegally parked in a military zone on the Kent coast, rapped on the driver's side door. The driver enquired what the problem was. "You've entered a prohibited area." "Oh no he hasn't," said a female voice from the passenger's seat.

But there is no doubt that the Home Guard could have been a powerful obstacle to invaders. "They would never have had an inch they wouldn't have had to fight over," recalled Jimmy Taylor, a bicycle despatch rider from Hampshire. That determination was reflected in casualties. During the war, 438 Home Guardsmen were killed by enemy action or died of their wounds (mostly following air raids). A further 768 died from causes attributable to their service.



## 2 Arm yourselves to the teeth

The depiction of the Home Guard as a pitchfork army has long been cemented in the public imagination. It is true that, when the force was first established in May 1940, there was a disturbing shortage of arms – so much so that LDV (as the guard was initially called) was jokingly said to stand for 'Last Desperate Venture'.

At first, the volunteers had to make do with a bewildering variety of weaponry, including muskets, swords, blunderbusses, truncheons and even golf clubs. One Lancashire Unit was armed with Snider-Enfield rifles that had been held in Manchester Zoo and had last been used in the Indian empire during the 19th century.

But the picture changed rapidly, thanks to the massive import of arms from North America. In June, 75,000 Ross rifles and 60 million rounds of ammunition arrived from Canada. Even better, in July the USA sent 615,000 M1917 rifles, each with 250 rounds of ammunition.

President Roosevelt got round America's strict neutrality laws by, first, declaring the vast arsenal surplus to his country's own requirements and, second, by selling it to the US Steel Corporation, who then sold it on to the British government.

Historians have often been dismissive of these American arms supplies. "Poor weapons," is the verdict of Sir Max Hastings. But much of this negativity was unjustified. The M1917 was no older or less efficient than the standard-issue British infantry weapon, the Short Magazine Lee Enfield (SMLE), whose origins dated back to 1907. In fact, the M1917 was so durable that it went on to see action in the Korean and even Vietnam wars. Sniper instructor Clifford Shore later described it as "probably the most accurate rifle I have ever used".



Men operate a Browning machine gun from a hitched trailer, 1942



### 3 Create a radical people's army

The Home Guard's supposed association with class-ridden, traditional conservatism is embodied in the authoritarian, snobbish form of Captain Mainwaring. Yet there was another side to its politics.

During the 1930s, as totalitarianism swept across Europe, and Spain was plunged into civil war, there were elements of the radical British left that saw a mass volunteer force as a vehicle for extending democracy and challenging the old order. One enthusiast for this concept was George Orwell, who joined the Home Guard in June 1940. "That rifle on the wall of the working-class flat or the labourer's cottage is the symbol of democracy," Orwell wrote in the *Evening Standard*.

An even more powerful advocate of such thinking was the journalist, military expert and First World War veteran Tom Wintringham. A former communist who had been expelled from the party because of his turbulent private life, he wrote a bestselling pamphlet in 1939 which set out the case for a people's militia to provide home defence. "This army of free men available for service at a few hours' notice is

part of a tradition of the peoples of these islands," he said.

After the formation of the Home Guard, Wintringham put his efforts into improving the training of the volunteers. His belief was that far too much emphasis was placed on basic drill, and not enough on skills such as the uses of camouflage, dugouts, explosives grenades and mortars.

With the help of some influential friends in the media, Wintringham acquired Osterley Park, the residence of the Earl of Jersey, as a new training base. But the government, suspicious of "any possible Bolshevism", disapproved of this initiative despite its success and in September 1940 it was closed down, with the army taking over Home Guard training.

Despite this, the anti-establishment mood certainly lived on among recruits, reflected in Labour's landslide in the 1945 general election. "There are those who say the idea of arming the people is a revolutionary idea. It certainly is," wrote Wintringham.



The front cover of *Picture Post* magazine shows a member of the Home Guard in camouflage during training at Osterley Park, September 1940

Home Guardsmen perfect the quick kill with commando knives, July 1943



### 4 Train elite troops to fight dirty

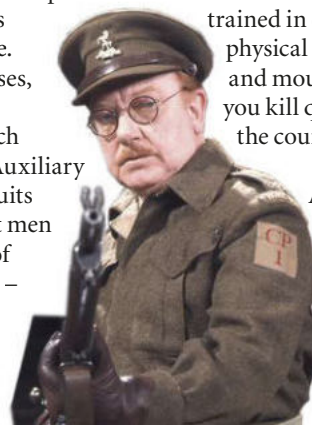
The bungling ineptitude of the platoon led by Captain Mainwaring (below) in *Dad's Army* could not be further removed from the ruthlessness shown by the Auxiliary Units, the elite wing of the Home Guard that would have carried out a guerrilla campaign against the Germans in the event of an invasion. Sometimes known as 'Churchill's Secret Army', the units were the brainchild of two men: Peter Fleming, a military intelligence officer and elder brother of the James Bond novelist Ian Fleming, who started recruiting for an embryonic resistance in Kent from April 1940; and Brigadier Colin Gubbins, whose involvement in the campaign against the IRA from 1919–21 provided him with valuable insights about underground warfare.

For organisational purposes, the coast of England was divided into 12 sectors, each with its own network of Auxiliary Units. Most of the recruits were tough, self-reliant men with a deep knowledge of their localities. Gubbins –

who was appointed leader of the units when they were given the green light in June 1940 – later said that, in Lincolnshire, he "sought out fenmen who knew every foot of their marshes and tricky fens", while in Hampshire he looked for forest rangers who moved across the land "as silently and swiftly as their own red deer".

Each unit had its own operational base, usually a well-concealed underground hideout, which contained sleeping accommodation, washing facilities, food store and water tanks, as well as an impressive arsenal of weapons, explosives, knives and sabotage equipment. Indeed, with their own Colt automatic pistols and Tommy sub-machine guns, the units were far better armed than most of the regular army. They were also trained in everything from night patrols to physical combat, including eye gouging and mouth slitting. "Foul methods help you kill quickly," was one of the mottos of the courses.

At their peak in late 1941, the Auxiliaries comprised 3,500 men in 600 patrols, and the force was not formally disbanded until the autumn of 1944.





### 5 Become a “miracle of improvisation”

As befitted a bank manager, Captain Mainwaring was devoted to the bureaucracy and rules of the Home Guard. But in reality there was a far more innovative, creative spirit about the organisation. That was reflected not only in how quickly more than 500,000 men were armed and put in uniform but also how efficiently it was administered. An analysis conducted in November 1944 found that the average annual cost to the Treasury of each member of the Home Guard was, incredibly, just £9.

In a departure from traditionalism, from 1942 women were recruited into the Home Guard in small numbers, though only in non-combatant, non-guarding duties like cooking and driving. Originality could also be seen in the grenades and bombs provided to the Home Guard in 1940, when the shortages of munitions were at their worst. The most primitive of these was the Molotov cocktail, essentially a glass bottle full of petrol with a fuel-soaked rag as the source of ignition. A technical advance on the Molotov cocktail was the self-igniting

phosphorous grenade or AW Bomb, which comprised a half pint bottle filled with a highly combustible mixture of yellow phosphorous, benzene, crude rubber and water. By August 1941, 6 million of these bombs had been made, nearly all of them going to the Home Guard.

Even more sophisticated was the Anti-Tank No 74 Grenade, known as ‘the sticky bomb’, which featured nitroglycerine encased in a metal sphere. Although crude, it could penetrate armour an inch thick. Altogether 2.5 million of them were made between 1940 and 1943.

Other enterprising developments include the Northover Projector (a form of primitive grenade launcher) and the Blacker Bombard (an anti-tank mortar), as well as an array of static roadside flame traps, flame fougasses (burning barrels of oil fired at the enemy), and mobile flamethrowers, all of which exploited Britain’s huge reserves of petrol in 1940. Not for nothing did Anthony Eden describe the Home Guard as “a miracle of improvisation”. **II**

.....  
**Leo McKinstry** is a journalist and author. His books include *Operation Sealion: How Britain Crushed the German War Machine's Dreams of Invasion in 1940* (John Murray, 2014)

#### DISCOVER MORE

##### FILM

► **Dad's Army**, starring Catherine Zeta-Jones, Bill Nighy and Michael Gambon, will be in cinemas from February

##### BBCSTORE

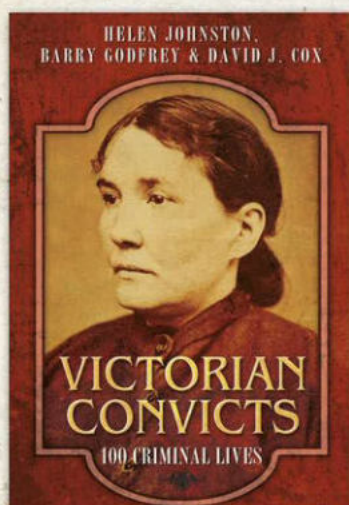
► Many of the **original Dad's Army** series are available to buy from the BBC Store at <https://store.bbc.com/dads-army>

**Home Guardsmen prepare to propel Molotov cocktails at invaders during training in south-east England**

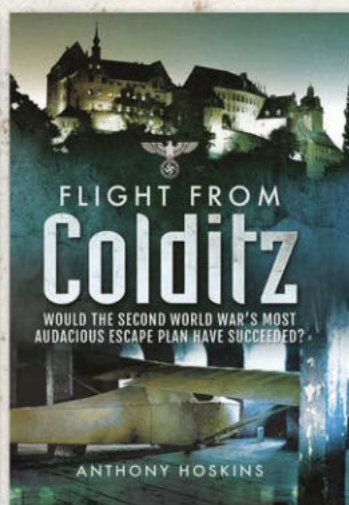




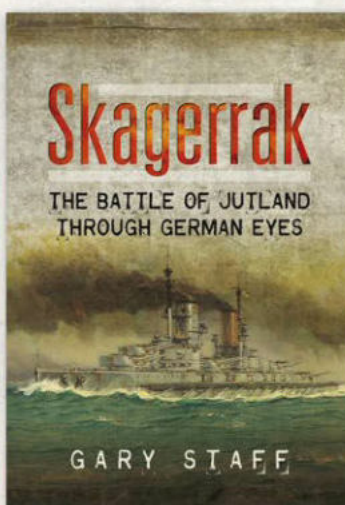
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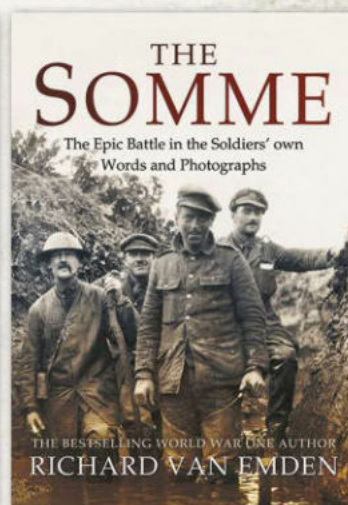
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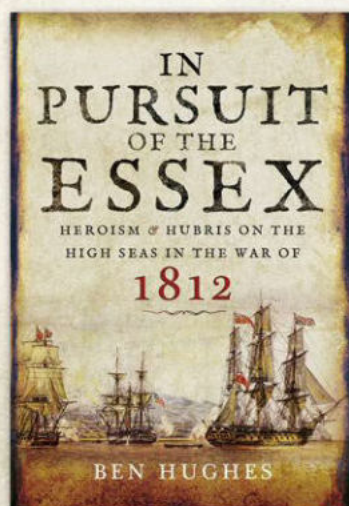
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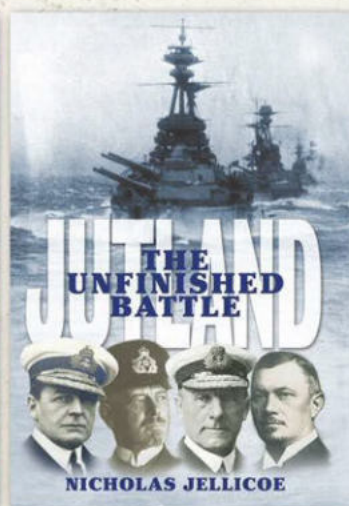
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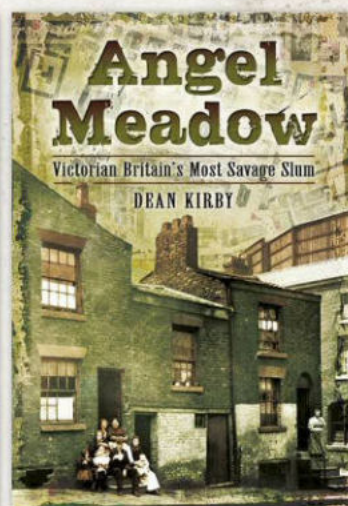
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A portrait of Benjamin Franklin in 1778. From 1757, Franklin was the most celebrated American in London, renowned as a scientist and inventor. Yet, in 1775 he was forced to flee and would become one of Britain's most implacable foes

BRIDGEMAN



# The revolution of Benjamin Franklin

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**George Goodwin**  
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PODCAST

Today he is celebrated as one of the architects of the colonies' victory in the American War of Independence. Yet, for most of his life, Benjamin Franklin was a dyed-in-the-wool British patriot, as **George Goodwin** explains

When the 84-year-old Benjamin Franklin died in Philadelphia in 1790, he was revered as an American founding father and patriot. He had been the man responsible for bringing France into the War of Independence and for keeping it there. Franklin was, as the later US president John Adams reluctantly admitted, second only to George Washington in his importance in securing the victory of the United States. Yet for more than four-fifths of his long life, Benjamin Franklin had considered himself to be a British royalist. For the best part of two decades he had enjoyed the life of an English gentleman in London – right up to 1775, when he was forced to flee.

Benjamin Franklin was born in Boston on 6 January 1706. He was the 16th child and youngest son of an English economic migrant from Ecton, Northamptonshire. At the age of 12, Ben was apprenticed as a printer to his brother James and when he was not printing his brother's *New England Courant*, he was busily reading his British books.

Boston was then the largest town in British America, but its population of 12,000 was not

a 50th of that of London, the greatest city in the western world. In staid, puritan Boston, most of the books Franklin read were those imported from London. He had read Bunyan as a child, but now he was consuming Locke, Defoe and Swift and the *Spectator* of Addison and Steele. He was later to describe Joseph Addison as a man “whose writings have contributed more to the improvement of the minds of the British nation, and polishing their manners, than those of any other English pen whatever”.

But Franklin was not content merely to read

Addison. He started imitating him, and at the age of just 16 he anonymously submitted a satirical piece to the *Courant*, written in the persona of an impoverished widow named ‘Silence Dogood’. It was brilliant and his brother James had no hesitation in placing it and its 13 successors on the front page, all without knowing the name of their author.

Young Ben's decision to keep his name secret had been a wise one, because when he divulged it, James was furious. The younger brother fled to Philadelphia before taking the glorious opportunity to travel to London.

## Rebuilt and reborn

Franklin's 18 months as a teenage printer in the imperial capital were to have a profound effect on him. London had been rebuilt and reborn, cleansed after the Great Fire and adorned with the architectural marvel of the new St Paul's.

From afar, Franklin had admired Addison's depiction of the coffee house society of writers and philosophers. Now, through his own writing and a growing self-confidence, he experienced it himself and enjoyed the company of freethinking men. The youngster Franklin was disappointed in his hopes of



A print of the Grand Union Flag, which is thought to have been approved by Franklin. This is considered to be the first national flag of the United States of America



## Benjamin Franklin

meeting his hero, Isaac Newton. But he did meet Newton's Royal Society collaborator and close friend, Hans Sloane, and rather cheekily sold the great collector several artefacts that were impervious to fire, made from the then relatively unknown asbestos.

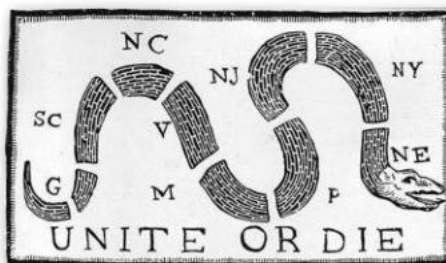
Franklin was tempted to stay in London permanently – perhaps, young and athletic as he was, as a swimming instructor. Instead he returned to Philadelphia as a printer and, through a careful cultivation of connections, he set up his own firm. It was extremely successful, so much so that he retired from the active running of the business at the early age of 42. Having established his fortune, he was now to find international fame through his electrical experiments and the invention of the lightning rod. He was, as acclaimed by Immanuel Kant in 1755, “The Prometheus of modern times”.

Yet in the 1750s Franklin made time for another life, one of public service. Over the previous decades he had founded some of America's great cultural institutions: the American Philosophical Society, the Library Company and what was to become the University of Pennsylvania. Influenced by Locke and Defoe, Franklin gave them British foundation stones.

As a representative of Pennsylvania at the Congress of Albany in 1754, Franklin sought to unite the disparate and often mutually antagonistic American colonies more firmly under British rule. It seemed a necessity in order to secure a Great British empire of North America at the expense of the French.

Franklin had a firm belief in a common British purpose, writing: “I look on the colonies as so many counties gained to Great Britain.” The Albany Plan proposed a defence pact between the colonies under the overall command of one man to be called (somewhat ironically) the President General. It was, however, an initiative that was too advanced and too comprehensive for the colonial assemblies, who rejected it. Franklin now concentrated on the affairs of his own colony and these, in 1757, were to enable him to return to London. With just one brief return to America, there he was to stay until 1775.

Ostensibly Franklin was in Britain on behalf of the Assembly of Pennsylvania with the aim of persuading the Penn family, the absentee proprietors and effectively owners of the colony, to pay taxes. This they adamantly refused to do and the relationship between Franklin and his social superior Thomas Penn rapidly deteriorated into a vicious propaganda battle fought out in the newspapers and by letter, with Franklin's description of Penn as behaving like a “low jockey” particularly piquing the proprietor. To Franklin there was only one solution – a



A later variant of a famous Franklin cartoon. When first published in 1754, ‘Join, or Die’ urged the colonies to combine forces against French efforts to seize British America

“Franklin sought to unite the disparate and often mutually antagonistic American colonies more firmly under British rule”

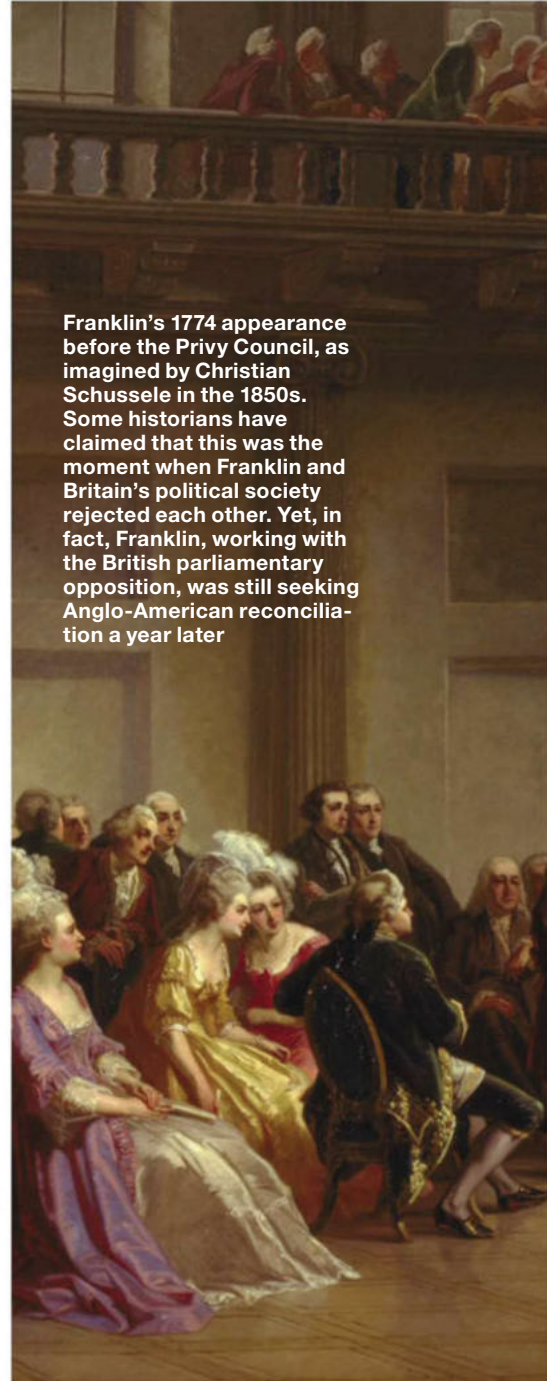
British one. He advocated that the British turn out the Penns and make Pennsylvania a royal colony with governors appointed from London. It was a cause he fought for for more than a decade until it was rejected by the British government itself. It was a turning point for Franklin but by no means the only, or most important, one.

### Rightly royal

The Penns apart, Franklin's life in London was extremely enjoyable. Science had captured the imagination of the aristocracy and Franklin was one of the most famous scientists alive and a central figure at the Royal Society. This celebrity gave him access to key members of successive governments who competed in their scientific interest as they did in their politics.

In 1760 Franklin was delighted when a new, youthful and proudly British king George III succeeded his all too Germanic grandfather. In 1762 George's former tutor, the Earl of Bute, became prime minister and his relationship with Franklin was sufficiently close for the latter's scantily qualified son William to be appointed as the royal governor of New Jersey. Bute was in power during the final months of the highly successful Seven Years' War that crushed the French threat in North America. However, there was dissatisfaction at the peace terms given to France, and Bute was attacked verbally in parliament

Franklin's 1774 appearance before the Privy Council, as imagined by Christian Schussele in the 1850s. Some historians have claimed that this was the moment when Franklin and Britain's political society rejected each other. Yet, in fact, Franklin, working with the British parliamentary opposition, was still seeking Anglo-American reconciliation a year later



and under physical threat from mobs led by the radical politician John Wilkes. Much to the king's horror, Bute resigned. His successor, George Grenville was not close to the king, nor indeed to Franklin.

Grenville's aim in government was clear: to make the Americans themselves finance the British army on their soil, whose presence was believed necessary to ‘secure the peace’. Franklin suggested an ingenious paper money scheme that would have boosted existing tax revenues. Grenville rejected it and instead introduced a Stamp Tax that would be applied to a vast number of transactions, making it, in effect, a tax on everyday living. The colonies were united in violent protest.

This was a major problem for the Marquess of Rockingham, who replaced Grenville as prime minister in 1765. It was also a problem for Franklin, who had acquiesced in the Stamp Act and found himself vilified in





Philadelphia. But Franklin also provided part of the solution: he was the most important of the experts on America who appeared before a committee of the whole House of Commons on 13 February 1766. His testimony convinced the house. The Stamp Act was repealed and the political situation settled.

In July 1766, Rockingham was himself replaced as prime minister by William Pitt, the man chiefly responsible for victory in the Seven Years' War. With Pitt's prestige high on both sides of the Atlantic, this should have been the moment when the relationship between Britain and its American colonies was regularised and the future of the British empire of North America secured. But Pitt, now the Earl of Chatham, was almost immediately debilitated by depression.

Into the resultant power vacuum stepped Charles Townshend, chancellor of the Exchequer, who, on his own authority,

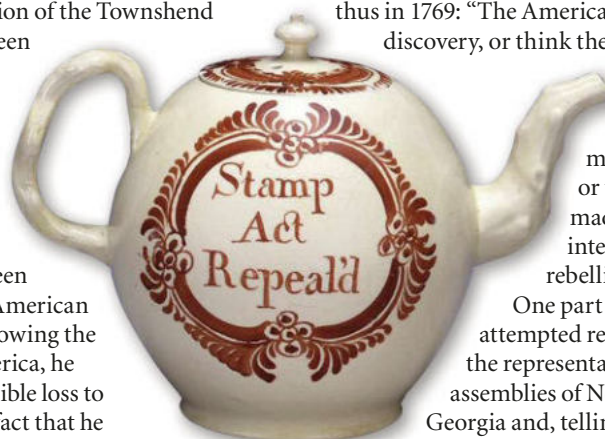
imposed a tax on commodities imported into America, including tea. As with the Stamp Act, this was to satisfy a majority of British MPs and outrage the colonists.

The introduction of the Townshend duties has also been described as a point when Franklin lost faith in Britain. This was not so. Certainly he began to fear a separation between Britain and the American colonies and, knowing the potential of America, he bewailed its possible loss to Britain. But the fact that he could account for this did not mean that he sought it.

In fact, Franklin tried to bridge the growing chasm in Anglo-colonial relations.

There certainly had been a breakdown in trust, which Edmund Burke summarised thus in 1769: "The Americans have made a discovery, or think they have made one, that we mean to oppress them: we have made a discovery, or think we have made one, that they intend to rise in rebellion against us."

One part of Franklin's attempted remedy was to add the representation of the assemblies of New Jersey, Georgia and, tellingly, Massachusetts, to that for



**This teapot was made to celebrate the repeal, in 1766, of the reviled Stamp Act**



# The making of a revolutionary

**1706**

Benjamin Franklin is born the son of a tallow chandler (candlemaker). At age 12, he is **apprenticed to his printer brother**, before moving to Philadelphia in 1723.

**1724-26**

Franklin becomes a printer in London before returning to Philadelphia as a fierce Anglophile.

**1726-57**

He enjoys great success as a printer, newspaper owner and journalist and then **turns to science**, winning the 18th-century equivalent of the Nobel Prize.

**1757-62**

Franklin returns to London as the first great transatlantic celebrity **on a mission** to make the Penn proprietors of Pennsylvania pay taxes. After the accession of George III, he builds links with Prime Minister Bute (pictured).



**1762-64**

After a spell in Philadelphia, he **returns to London to make Pennsylvania a British Royal Colony**. This is rejected in 1768.

**1766**

Following Franklin's triumphant appearance before the House of Commons, the **hated Stamp Act is repealed**.

**1764-75**

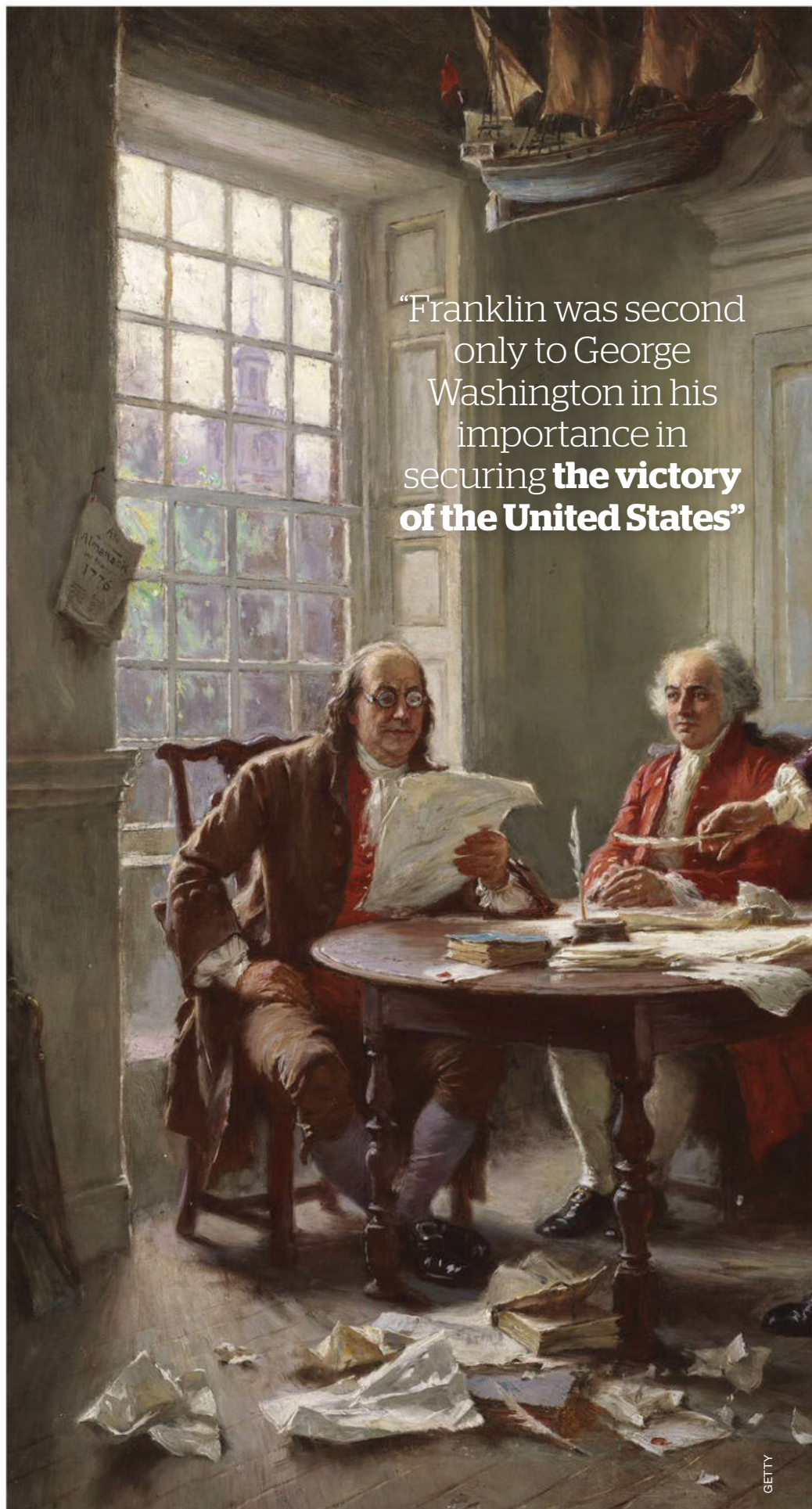
The slow transformation of Franklin from government supporter to **British opponent**. In 1775, he is forced to flee.

**1776-85**

In Paris in an ambassadorial role. By bringing France into the war against Britain, Franklin is **crucial in securing American independence**.

**1776-87**

Franklin (pictured) is the **only person to sign all three key documents** in the creation of the United States: the Declaration of Independence (1776); the Treaty of Paris (1783); and the Constitution (1787). He dies in 1790.







Jean Leon Gerome Ferris's painting shows Benjamin Franklin (left) reviewing a draft of the American Declaration of Independence. With him are future US presidents John Adams and Thomas Jefferson (standing, who wrote the draft)



Colonists throw tea chests overboard in this depiction of the Boston Tea Party of 16 December 1773. Franklin was appalled by the action, but even more by the British government's retribution and increasing coercion against the colonies

Pennsylvania. It made him the pre-eminent representative of American colonial interests in Britain.

The other, acting against the predominance of an anti-American group in the government of first the Duke of Grafton and then (from 1770) Lord North, was to associate with British opposition factions. One of these was led by a revived Chatham acting with the Earl of Shelburne, and the other by Rockingham.

### Stoic silence

Franklin's American and British interests were to fuse together when, in January 1774, he was called to appear at the Cockpit offices of the Privy Council, in order to answer for, among other things, the outbreak of lawlessness known as the Boston Tea Party. He was, much to the amusement of the council, subjected to a venomous and humiliating denunciation by the government's solicitor general, Alexander Wedderburn. This Franklin bore stoically in silence. However, those historians who deem that this was the time that Franklin swore revenge on Britain ignore the lawyers who represented him at the Cockpit: they were the chief legal advisers of Shelburne and Rockingham. The opprobrium heaped upon Franklin was not merely through his being a representative of rebellious Americans but because he was clearly seen as a member of the British opposition.

Franklin did not leave Britain after the Cockpit, but remained in London for more than a year. In the summer he began a series of meetings with Chatham, now with health almost restored, in order to prepare a plan for parliament. This, it was intended, would finally resolve the American issue. In February 1775 Chatham presented it.

Franklin had hoped that Chatham would sway the House of Lords and bring about a change of government. Instead, the Earl of Sandwich, on behalf of the administration and rightly confident of bedrock support, treated Chatham's plan with contempt.

As for Franklin, who was observing as Chatham's guest, Sandwich looked him straight in the eye and condemned him as "one of the bitterest and most mischievous enemies this country had ever known". However, Franklin was not deterred and, although he knew that his arrest was becoming ever more likely, he still attempted some last-ditch negotiations before leaving.

The first shots in the American War of Independence were exchanged while Franklin crossed the Atlantic. It was during the voyage that he made a final decision. And it was only after Benjamin Franklin had set foot on American soil that Sandwich's intended slur became an observable truth. **H**

George Goodwin is the author of *Benjamin Franklin in London: The British Life of America's Founding Father*, published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson (US: Yale University Press) this month

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#### RADIO

► **Benjamin Franklin in London** by George Goodwin will be Radio 4's Book of the Week from 15 February



### ON THE PODCAST

George Goodwin pays a visit to Benjamin Franklin House in London

► [historyextra.com/bbchistorymagazine/podcasts](http://historyextra.com/bbchistorymagazine/podcasts)



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Kubbet Duris, Gertrude Bell on horseback in foreground A\_340 © Gertrude Bell Archive, Newcastle University



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## THE **HISTORY** ESSAY



Sir John Franklin's expedition to navigate the North-West Passage meets a calamitous end in W Thomas Smith's 1895 painting. Within a few years of his death, memorials to Franklin had been erected everywhere from Westminster Abbey to Tasmania

# WHY THE BRITISH LOVE A PLUCKY LOSER

The veneration of heroic failures like Scott of the Antarctic and the Light Brigade isn't necessarily the product of Britons' generosity of spirit

**By Stephanie Barczewski**



In May 1845, Captain Sir John Franklin set sail to the Canadian Arctic in order to complete the North-West Passage. The Royal Navy had been intensively pursuing this objective for the previous four decades, and now it finally appeared to be within their grasp. Only a few hundred miles separated Montreal Island, the eastern

point reached by explorers from the Hudson's Bay Company in 1839, from the westernmost point attained by Sir John Ross in the Gulf of Boothia in 1831. The task was not quite as simple as it appeared, however. The remaining section of the North-West Passage lay within an unmapped area encompassing some 70,000 square miles and through waters that were choked with ice even in summer.

A portly 59, Franklin had not seen Arctic service for two decades. He set out with 134 men, an extremely large number for a polar expedition, for if supplies ran low it would be impossible to feed so many mouths from the minimal sustenance that nature could provide.

Franklin's expedition thus entailed a huge potential for disaster, even by the risky standards of polar exploration. And it did not take long for that potential to be realised. After a whaling vessel spotted Franklin's two ships moored to an iceberg in Baffin Bay in July 1845, the expedition vanished without a trace. At first, there was little concern, but by 1848 the Admiralty and the British public were seriously alarmed. Over the next decade, dozens of rescue expeditions searched for Franklin, but it was not until 1854 that a clue emerged when the Hudson's Bay Company's John Rae encountered a group of Inuit near Pelly Bay in present-day Nunavut. Spotting one of them with a gold cap-band similar to those worn by British naval officers, Rae inquired about its origin. The Inuit told him that a few years earlier they had encountered around 40 emaciated *kabloonas* (white men) moving south towards the Great Fish river. The following spring, they found a camp containing about 30 corpses.

In 1859, Rae's information was confirmed when an expedition headed by Captain Francis Leopold McClintock found a cairn containing a note written by one of Franklin's officers. The note revealed that in September 1846, Franklin's ships had been trapped by ice off King William Island. When they were still beset in the spring of 1848, most of the 105 surviving men attempted to head south on foot, though some may have remained with the ships. (Franklin was not among either group; he had died on 11 June 1847.)

The only hope for the southward trekkers was to reach the Hudson's Bay Company's

post on the Great Slave Lake, 850 miles to the south over some of the most barren terrain in the world. The strongest men struggled for nearly three months to the southern coast of King William Island, only 80 miles from the ships. Their last camp was discovered a decade later by McClintock's men, who found one of the ship's boats mounted on a sledge with two skeletons inside. Fourteen more bodies lay beneath the boat. The bones were scarred by knife-cuts, suggesting that the men had resorted to cannibalism in a desperate attempt to stay alive.

By any standard, the Franklin expedition had been a disaster that had produced by far the worst loss of life in the history of polar exploration. The calamitous result, however, did not prevent Franklin from becoming a hero. By the late 1850s, when it was clear that he was dead, he was lauded in terms that would have made Nelson blush. In 1860, Franklin's fellow naval officer and Arctic explorer Sherard Osborn referred to him as "the Alpha and Omega of modern Arctic exploration". "In all things, and under all circumstances," said Osborn,

"Franklin stands *sans peur et sans reproche*... Combining the highest qualities of hand and head, we find Franklin labouring equally well in the field of battle and in the field of maritime discovery; and it is in the double character of naval hero and distinguished navigator, that he may almost be said to stand alone in our history."

Franklin would get a memorial in Westminster Abbey and another in the Painted Hall of the Old Royal Naval College in Greenwich, as well as statues in central London, Hobart in Tasmania, and his birthplace of Spilsby in Lincolnshire. He was celebrated in verse, song and art well into the late 19th century.

This sort of thing – the elevation of an epic failure to heroic status – sorely vexes some British commentators. The comedian Tim Brooke-Taylor writes: "When it comes down to it, the British aren't honestly that fussed about winning. Better a gallant loser than an outright victor in most of our eyes, and if we do have to win, it has to be by the narrowest margin. What makes British heroism so impressive is the way we lose, going down with all guns blazing,

ALAMY



The statue of the doomed Sir John Franklin in his birthplace of Spilsby in Lincolnshire



“What makes British heroism so impressive is the way we lose, going down with all guns blazing, fighting to the last man,’ comedian Tim Brooke-Taylor observed”



Members of Captain Scott's final expedition to Antarctica toil in the soft snow of the Beardmore Glacier, 13 December 1911. Scott was “a suitable hero for a nation in decline”, wrote the explorer's biographer Roland Huntford

fighting to the last man, rallying around the standard. These are the ideals and examples that raise a lump in every good British throat – and which are partially responsible for the loss of the empire.”

Writing in *The Guardian* in 2010 about the upcoming celebrations for the centennial of Captain Scott's death in the Antarctic in 1912, John Crace suggests that “decline and fall is a paradigm of British life over much of the last hundred years. Perhaps we get the national heroes we deserve.”

And in praising Britain's uncharacteristic sporting success in the 2012 London Olympics, Jeremy Paxman asserts: “The background murmur of the last 40 years in Britain has been ‘We're rubbish’; that the country is a land of heroic failures... Sporting failure has fitted comfortably into the story of a nation in decline, a country that has lost an empire and failed to find the goal net.”

In their shared exasperation, Brooke-Taylor, Crace and Paxman link the celebration of failure to Britain's loss of the empire and to a broader narrative of national decline. Such complaints are one mani-

festation of a strain in British culture known as ‘declinism’, which asserts, in the words of the historian Jim Tomlinson, that British economic and imperial decline in the 20th century was “not... the result of the inevitable competitive rough and tumble development of global capitalism, but... of pathological failings in British society”.

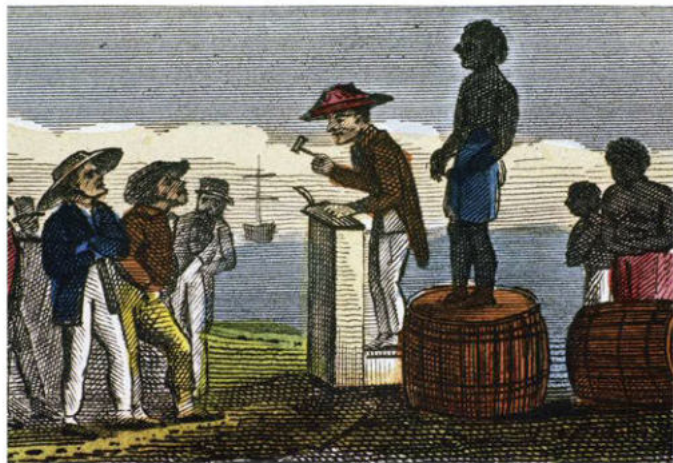
In the 1980s in particular, declinism enjoyed considerable influence, as it suited the Thatcherite view that British decline had been a failure of will, rather than being caused by anti-colonial challenges to empire, international economic competition, or ageing industrial infrastructure. Declinist arguments had many strands, but one iteration focused on the British tendency to celebrate failure. In his 1985 dual biography of the Antarctic explorers Robert Falcon Scott and Roald Amundsen, the polar historian Roland Huntford sought an explanation for why the British had for so long admired Scott, whom he denigrated as a “bungler” who had not only lost the race to the pole but had also killed himself and four of his companions in the process. In Huntford's view, Scott's undeserved lofty stature was due to the fact that he was “a suitable hero for a nation in decline”.

There is a serious problem, however, both with these types of declinist arguments and with a linkage of the celebration of heroic fail-



## THE HISTORY ESSAY

“Heroic failure made it possible for the British to see themselves as self-sacrificing in an era in which they nakedly pursued national aggrandisement via imperial conquest”



**Africans are auctioned in the West Indies in 1824. Slavery was the dark side of the imperial project, at odds with the idealised vision**

ure to British decline. Returning to the story of Sir John Franklin, it's important to note that his elevation to heroic status occurred in 1850, not 1950. And he is only one of many examples of failures being celebrated as heroes in British culture that can be found as far back as the early 19th century, when explorers like Mungo Park, who died in 1806 while tracing the course of the river Niger through central Africa, and soldiers like Rollo Gillespie, who died in 1814 while leading a foolhardy attack at the battle of Kalunga during the Anglo-Nepalese War, served as prototypes. By the 1840s and 1850s, when Franklin disappeared into the Arctic ice and the Light Brigade charged at Balaclava, it was a common mode of assessing and elevating the actions of British heroes.

Heroic failure thus cannot be blamed for, or even viewed as a reflection of, Britain's decline, as it began at a time when British power was at its apex. In reality, the emergence of heroic failure as a cultural ideal had nothing to do with Britain's decline as a great power and everything to do with its rise. At first glance, such an argument seems paradoxical, but it becomes less so once the distinctive cultural history of Britain's great-power status is taken into account.

That status was from the 18th century onwards heavily reliant upon the British empire as the source of national wealth, security and greatness. The empire was so crucial to Britain's sense of itself as a nation, that in the moments when it failed to live up to its ideals, it challenged not only the efficacy of colonial administration, but national values and self-conceptions.

It was inevitable, however, that such a large

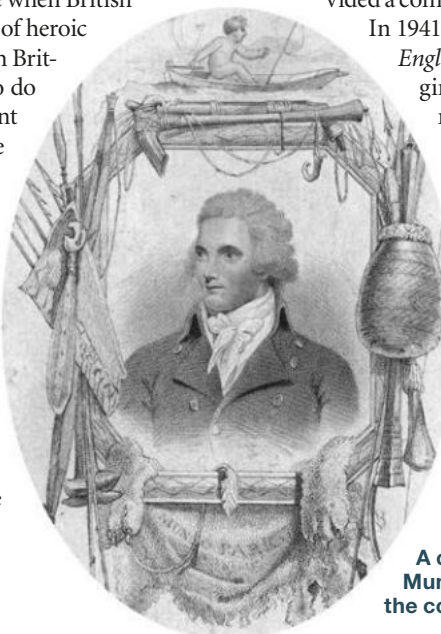
and complex entity would at times be something less than idealistic. The empire was, by the standards of its own time, benevolent and noble, but it was also, equally by the standards of its own time, oppressive and violent. The empire could be imagined as a zone in which cultural enlightenment and Christianity were promoted. But this idealised vision was challenged by thorny issues such as slavery, which was not abolished until 1834, as well as by the massive military force that was required to maintain the security of existing colonies and to conquer new territory – all of which made it difficult to see the empire as based on consent rather than coercion.

**T**his ever-present tension between ideal and reality required a cultural conception of empire that de-emphasised its coercive and violent aspects. Such a conception relied heavily on factual and fictional stories that depicted the empire in a positive light. Those stories frequently featured failures as their heroes because they helped the British to see themselves as something other than conquerors and oppressors. By presenting alternative visions of empire, failed heroes maintained the pretence that the empire was about things besides power, force and domination. The 24th Foot making a desperate last stand at Isandlwana; General Gordon facing annihilation at the hands of the Mahdi in Khartoum; Captain Scott and his companions dying of starvation and exposure on the return journey from the South Pole – all of these failed heroes, and numerous others, made it possible for the British to see themselves as selfless and self-sacrificing in an era in which they nakedly pursued national aggrandisement via imperial conquest.

Heroic failure endures as a British ideal because, as Britain's place in the world has evolved over the last century, it has proven adaptable to a variety of circumstances. During the Second World War, it provided a comforting myth of resilience in the face of adversity.

In 1941, George Orwell wrote in his essay *England Your England*: “In England all the boasting and flag-wagging, the ‘Rule Britannia’ stuff, is done by small minorities. The patriotism of the common people is not vocal or even conscious. They do not retain among their historical memories the name of a single military victory. English literature, like other literatures, is full of battle-poems, but it is worth noticing that the ones that have won for themselves a kind of popularity are always a tale of disasters and retreats... The most stirring battle-poem in English is about a brigade of cavalry which charged in the wrong direction.”

In the 1960s, heroic failure was adapted as a symbol of Britain's changing imperial values in an era of decolonisation, exemplified by



**A c1820 engraving of the explorer Mungo Park, who died while tracing the course of the river Niger**





Lieutenant Teignmouth Melvill grasps the 1st Battalion's Queen's Colour accompanied by Lieutenant Coghill following the Zulus' defeat of British forces at the battle of Isandlwana, 1879. Both men were awarded Victoria Crosses after being killed in the clash

ALAMY



### THE **HISTORY** ESSAY

“The British reluctance to accept the truth about their empire led the 19th-century historian JR Seeley to write that they had ‘conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind’”



**Captain Louis Edward Nolan (played by David Hemmings) gallops headlong into the valley of death in the 1968 film *The Charge of the Light Brigade*. In the post-imperial age, Britons are far more mindful of the moral ambiguities of empire**

films such as *Zulu* (1964), which uses the battle of Isandlwana as a backdrop to set in motion its examination of the moral ambiguities of empire, and *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (1968), a complex combination of epic and satire that repurposes the most famous heroic failure in British history for a post-imperial and counter-cultural era. In more recent decades, as I've already discussed, heroic failure has come to serve as a metaphor for British decline, and has sometimes even been blamed for it.

The evolution of heroic failure to serve a variety of national purposes over the course of the 20th century, however, should not be permitted to conceal the reason for which it first emerged in the 19th: to help hide the uncomfortable realities of imperialism. The British empire was created by an island nation conquering a vast amount of territory far beyond its shores, something that could only have happened as a result of deliberate and aggressive intent.

The British reluctance to accept this inconvenient truth led essayist and historian JR Seeley to pen his famous dictum that the British had “conquered and peopled half the world in a fit of absence of mind”. In Seeley's eyes, the British were unique in lacking a “violent military character” as colonial rulers; it was

impossible for Britain to be a despotic conqueror of other peoples, because that was fundamentally incompatible with the nation's ideals.

Seeley thus crafted one counter-narrative – of ‘absent-mindedness’ – to blunt the uncomfortable realities of empire. It was – and remains – important to the British to see themselves not as aggressive, authoritarian and violent imperial conquerors, but as high-minded administrators who acquired much of their colonial territory by accident or at least from benevolent motives. They ruled this territory with a velvet glove rather than an iron fist, and sacrificed their own lives in order to benefit the places over which they ruled. Heroic failure helped them to do all of that. **H**

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**Stephanie Barczewski** is professor of history at Clemson University in South Carolina and a specialist in modern British cultural history

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##### BOOK

► **Heroic Failure and the British** by Stephanie Barczewski (Yale, 2016)

**Next month's essay:** James Sharpe explores the dark side of Elizabethan England





Opera singers give a performance at Turin's Teatro Regio. Many of the 18th century's biggest stars went under a 'castrator' (inset)

# CASTRATED SUPERSTARS

Audiences feted them, patrons showered money on them and women threw themselves at their feet.

**Anna Maria Barry** reveals how castrated opera singers became the rock gods of the 18th century >



It is the autumn of 1734 and the King's Theatre on London's Haymarket is packed to the rafters. As the last notes of the opera fade away, the fashionable audience erupts into frantic applause. The star singer steps forward to take a bow, when from the pit a well-heeled woman screams out: "One God! One Farinelli!"

Farinelli was the stage name of Carlo Broschi (1705–82), the most famous opera singer of the 18th century. He was something akin to a modern-day rock star. He commanded huge fees, audiences reacted hysterically to his performances, women lusted after him and he was seen as a threat to the establishment. But there was something very unusual about Farinelli: he was a castrato.

Castrati, as their name suggests, were opera singers who had been castrated before puberty in order to preserve their youthful singing voices. As these unfortunate boys turned into men, their voices developed in a unique way, producing a sound that many found exquisite.

This unusual practice originated in 16th-century Italy, where castrati could be found singing in courts and choirs, including that of the Sistine Chapel. As women were banned from singing in churches, these high male voices were welcomed. They soon became so popular that by the 18th century there was scarcely a performance of Italian opera that did not feature one among its cast.

The castrati craze reached its zenith in the 1720s and 1730s, when these singers became superstars. Audiences would frequently exclaim "Long live the little knife", in praise of the tools that had created these unique voices. At the height of this fashion, it is estimated that 4,000 Italian boys were castrated every year in the name of music. But how and why was this procedure carried out?

## Genital mutilation

Many castrati were from poor families who had their sons castrated with high hopes that they would find success and bring prosperity. Others, including Farinelli, were from wealthier families. Records suggest that some, including the celebrated Caffarelli (see box, right), even requested the procedure themselves. Nevertheless, many in the 18th century found the genital mutilation of young boys just as barbaric and distasteful as we do today. When the music historian Dr Charles Burney (1726–1814) travelled through Italy, trying to discover where the procedure was carried out, no city was willing to admit responsibility. He recorded: "I was told at Milan that it was at Venice; at Venice that it was Bologna; but at Bologna the fact was denied, and I was referred to Florence; from Florence to Rome, and from Rome I was sent to Naples..."



Due to a lack of testosterone, castrati were often tall and barrel-chested – a fact reflected in William Hogarth's etching of Farinelli (left) and Senesino (right) performing Handel's *Flavius* in c1728

"Castrati were seen as a **sexual threat**. Historians have described the 'groupies' who lavished them with gifts and affections"

As it was not practised openly, little evidence exists to build a complete picture of exactly how castration was performed. Historians believe, however, that the operation was often conducted by village barbers, who frequently performed minor surgeries in this period. Boys were typically castrated between the ages of seven and nine. In order to ease the pain they were given opium, or pressure was applied to their carotid artery until they passed out. They were then soaked in a hot bath before their spermatic cord was severed or, in some cases, their testicles were completely removed.

Castration was a dangerous procedure, and many boys are believed to have died during the process. Those who survived found that a lack of testosterone meant that their joints did not harden, which gave them very long limbs and ribs. As a result, castrati were often tall and barrel-chested, which accentuated their strange voices.

After being castrated, the young boys received rigorous training at singing schools. Here they spent intense hours singing and studying, with very little time for leisure. Those with talent and determination typically made a debut in their teenage years. But only the best made it to the operatic stage. The

remainder tended to join church choirs. Dr Burney called these unfortunates "the refuse of the opera houses". For a select few, however, great fame and wealth lay in wait.

One of the first castrato superstars was Senesino. He spent much of his career in London, where he commanded vast sums and mixed with high society. Senesino is best remembered for his volatile working relationship with Handel. He took 17 leading roles in the composer's operas yet, at one point, left Handel's Royal Academy to join the rival Opera of the Nobility. With the latter company, he famously appeared on stage alongside the younger castrato, Farinelli. During one performance an incident occurred which has passed into operatic legend. According to Dr Burney: "Senesino had the part of a furious tyrant, and Farinelli that of an unfortunate hero in chains; but in the course of the first air, the captive so softened the heart of the tyrant, that Senesino, forgetting his stage-character, ran to Farinelli and embraced him..."

Farinelli was by far the most famous castrato. He thrilled audiences across Europe, amassing a huge fortune. His wealthy patrons showered him with gifts and his portrait was painted countless times. His vocal skill was unsurpassed. On one occasion he famously





had a contest with a trumpet player, easily beating the instrumentalist with his vocal ornamentation.

While singers such as Senesino and Farinelli were hugely popular, they were not universally adored. Many in Britain saw the castrati as dangerously degenerate figures, symbolising the worst excesses of Catholic southern Europe. Some saw them as a threat to British order, while others disapproved of the vast salaries they commanded.

A satirical print reflecting these concerns appeared in 1735, entitled *The Opera House or the Italian Eunuch's Glory*. It was dedicated to "those generous encouragers of foreigners, and ruiners of England", and listed the gifts that Farinelli had "condescended" to accept from his British patrons. These included a diamond ring and a golden snuff box.

### Voracious lovers

Ironically, castrati were also seen as a sexual threat. The devotion these singers inspired among women caused great unease. Historians have described the 'groupies' who lavished the castrati with gifts and affection, even wearing medallions featuring portraits of their favourite singer. Many society women had affairs with castrati, seeing them as ideal candidates for discreet liaisons as there was no risk of pregnancy. Rumours soon began to circulate that these singers were generous and voracious lovers in spite of their castration. Some even believed that castration could enhance sexual performance. These ideas

were fuelled by popular songs and pamphlets. Just one example concerned Farinelli's prowess: "Well knowing eunuchs can their wants supply, / And more than bragging boasters satisfy; / Whose pow'r to please the fair expires too fast, / While F-----lli stands it to the last."

In 1766 a scandal erupted when the castrato Tenducci (1736–90) eloped with a 15-year-old Irish heiress. Her father tracked them down and had Tenducci thrown into prison.

However, by the late 18th century taste was changing, and the glory days of the castrati soon passed. Upon retirement, some singers took on young proteges as adopted sons. Others developed new careers entirely.

The last great operatic castrato was Velluti (1780–1861), who was known for his diva-like behaviour. He performed in London in the 1820s, where he was the first castrato to appear in 25 years. Castration was made illegal in Italy following unification in the mid-19th century, and the Catholic church prohibited the employment of castrati in 1878. Some singers still lingered in church choirs, however. Moreschi (1858–1922), known as 'the last castrato', survived into the 20th century and even made some recordings towards the end of his life. These scratchy and haunting records, widely available online, give us a vague sense of what these extraordinary men might have sounded like.

Although the reign of the castrati has long since passed, their fame still resonates. In Bologna, where he lived from 1761 until his death, a Farinelli Study Centre has been established. In 2006 Farinelli's skeleton was exhumed for scientific study, which revealed that his body had indeed been impacted by castration. He was taller than average, with long limb-bones that hadn't fused adequately.

In 1994 Farinelli's life was the subject of an eponymous film, made by Gérard Corbiau. Producers attempted to digitally recreate Farinelli's voice by merging recordings of a countertenor and a soprano. Despite these attempts, nobody can really know what this most celebrated of all castrati actually sounded like. We can only imagine the strange and powerful voice of the man who inspired that famous exclamation of 1734: "One God! One Farinelli!" **H**

**Anna Maria Barry** (@AnnaMariaB87) is a historian who specialises in opera singers of the 19th century. She is completing her PhD at Oxford Brookes University

### DISCOVER MORE

#### BOOKS

- **The World of the Castrati** by Patrick Barbier (Souvenir, 2010)
- **The Castrato and His Wife** by Helen Berry (OUP, 2012)

## Star qualities

Three castrati whose colourful characters and brilliant voices made waves in high society

### Siface (1653–97)

Giovanni Francesco Grossi, known as Siface, was born in Tuscany. He was a fiery individual, who on one occasion offended the French ambassador to Rome by refusing to perform without payment.

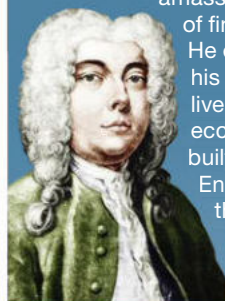
Siface spent some time in London, where he performed at the home of Samuel Pepys, before leaving as he could not tolerate the climate. He was murdered on the road to Ferrara in 1697, purportedly on the orders of a nobleman with whose wife Siface had enjoyed a sexual liaison.

#### The doomed lover



### Senesino (1686–1758)

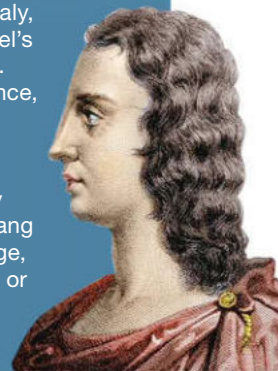
**The socialite** Senesino, whose real name was Francesco Bernardi, was the son of a barber from Siena. He was castrated at the relatively late age of 13. After making his debut in Venice in 1707, he quickly gained a European reputation. He passed much of his career in London, where he mixed with the upper echelons of society and amassed a huge collection of fine art and rare books. He eventually retired to his home town, where he lived out his years in an eccentric fashion. He built a house in the English style and resided there with his black servant, a monkey and a parrot.



### Caffarelli (1710–83)

**The loose cannon** Caffarelli was the stage name of Gaetano Majorano, who hailed from the Italian town of Bitonto. Unusually, records indicate that he requested castration himself. He attained great success in Italy, being the first to sing Handel's famous aria 'Ombra mai fu'. Louis XV invited him to France, but his career here was cut short after he wounded a poet during a duel.

Caffarelli was notoriously temperamental. He often sang whatever he wished on stage, sometimes even mimicking or heckling other singers as they performed.







BBC History Magazine's

# Roman Britain Day

**Saturday 27 February 2016, 10am–5.30pm**

M Shed, Princes Wharf, Bristol BS1 4RN

**With Barry Cunliffe, Richard Hobbs, David Mattingly, Bronwen Riley and Miles Russell**

*Find out how Britain was incorporated into the Roman empire and what life was like for those living under occupation. This event includes a buffet lunch and regular teas and coffees*



Bronwen Riley

**Barry Cunliffe** is emeritus professor of European archaeology at the University of Oxford and the author of several books on ancient Britain, including *Britain Begins*.

## Talk Country Life in Roman Wessex

Barry will show how studies of five Roman villas have shed remarkable light on life in this corner of Roman Britain, offering new insights into the rural economy and farming technology of the time.

**Richard Hobbs** is a curator of Romano-British collections at the British Museum and the co-author of *Roman Britain: Life at the Edge of Empire*.

## Talk The Richness of Britain

In this talk, Richard will reveal how a selection of fascinating objects from Roman Britain can teach us a huge amount about everyday life in the empire's most northerly province.

**Miles Russell** is senior lecturer in archaeology at Bournemouth University. He regularly appears on TV and in this magazine and is co-author of *UnRoman Britain*.

## Talk The 'Face' of Roman Britain

Britain was part of the empire for four centuries and yet there is a curious lack of portrait sculpture from this period. Miles will discuss what this might mean for Britain's place in the Roman world.

## David Mattingly

is professor of Roman archaeology at the University of Leicester. His books include *An Imperial Possession: Britain in the Roman Empire*.

## Talk Experiencing the Roman Empire in Britain and Beyond

Museums, popular books and TV programmes tend to reinforce the view that the Roman period was a time of social and cultural advancement for the majority of Britons. But was that really the case? In this talk, David will offer a more nuanced interpretation of the impact of the Roman conquest on the native population.

**Bronwen Riley** is head of content at English Heritage and series editor of English Heritage guidebooks. Her most recent book is *Journey to Britannia: From the Heart of Rome to Hadrian's Wall, AD 130*.

## Talk Visit Britannia, AD 130

Bronwen will describe an epic journey from Rome to Hadrian's Wall, bringing the smells, sounds, colours and textures of travel in the second century AD vividly to life.

> Visit [historyextra.com/bbchistorymagazine/events](http://historyextra.com/bbchistorymagazine/events) for full details



Andrew Roberts

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# EVENTS

Last  
chance  
to book

Join us for  
two day-events  
in Bristol

BBC History Magazine's

## First World War in 1916 Day

**Sunday 28 February 2016, 10am–5.30pm**

M Shed, Princes Wharf, Bristol BS1 4RN

**With Peter Hart, Nick Hewitt, David Reynolds\*,  
Catriona Pennell and Andrew Roberts**

*Discover the story of 1916. This was the year of the battles of the Somme, Verdun and Jutland and of great changes back at home. This event includes a buffet lunch and regular teas and coffees*

**David Reynolds\*** is professor of international history at the University of Cambridge and the author of numerous books. He is the presenter of a new BBC Radio 4 series on the battle of Verdun.

### **Talk The Battle of Verdun**

David's talk will tell the story of Verdun – the first major clash of 1916, which pitted the French and German armies against each other in a bloody battle of attrition.

**Nick Hewitt** is a naval historian, author and broadcaster who is head of heritage development at the National Museum of the Royal Navy.

### **Talk Jutland: Drama in the North Sea**

Jutland was the most important naval clash of the war. In this talk, Nick will return to those crucial 16 hours when the outcome of the battle hung in the balance. He will also address the question of who actually won the day.

**Peter Hart** is the oral historian of the Imperial War Museum and has written several books on the First World War.

### **Talk Life in the Trenches, 1916**

By 1916 the war in the trenches on the western front had settled down into a grim battle for survival. Peter's talk will look at how the soldiers coped with the privations and dangers of trench warfare.

**Catriona Pennell** is a senior lecturer at the University of Exeter who specialises in the social and cultural history of the First World War.

### **Talk The Ultimate Test: Was 1916 the Hardest Year of the War for Ordinary Britons?**

With mounting death tolls and ever-increasing demands being made on civilians, it could be argued that 1916 was the year that tested the British empire to destruction. Catriona's talk will focus on how the populations of Britain and Ireland responded to this challenge.

**Andrew Roberts** is a historian, bestselling author and broadcaster. His latest book is *Elegy: The First Day on the Somme*.

### **Talk Elegy: The First Day on the Somme**

At 7.30am on 1 July 1916 the British troops rose from their front-line trenches after a week-long bombardment that was supposed to destroy the German barbed wire and trenches. Before the sun went down, 57,471 of them were casualties and it was the worst day in the history of the British Army. Andrew Roberts asks what went wrong.

**\*Due to unforeseen circumstances Keith Jeffery has withdrawn from the event and been replaced by David Reynolds**



### **Venue:**

M Shed, Princes Wharf,  
Wapping Road, Bristol BS1 4RN  
[mshed.org](http://mshed.org)

### **Tickets (per day):**

**£70** Subscribers to  
BBC History Magazine  
**£75** non-subscribers

### **How to book:**

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[historyextra.com/events](http://historyextra.com/events)  
Subscribers, please quote the code SUBSMSHED and have your subscriber number to hand when booking (you can find this on the address label of your magazine). If you have a digital subscription, please forward your subscription order confirmation to [digitalsubs@historyextra.com](mailto:digitalsubs@historyextra.com) and our digital marketing team will supply you with a code for reduced rate tickets.

### **TERMS AND CONDITIONS**

We reserve the right to replace any speaker with an alternative of equal stature in the unlikely event that they are unable to attend. Please let us know when booking of any special access requirements.  
BBC History Magazine subscribers should have their subscriber number to hand when booking. Tickets are non-refundable and places are limited. A £2.25 transaction fee applies to all bookings.

or call **0871 620 4021+**

\*calls cost 10p per minute plus network extras



# Verdun

For most of 1916, the French and Germans were locked in a gruelling, 10-month trial of strength that nearly bled both armies to death.

**David Reynolds** tells the story of Verdun, a battle that has assumed almost sacred status in France

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Accompanies a two-part BBC Radio 4 series on Verdun







**Fight to the death**

French troops under shellfire at Verdun. The battle for the iconic fortress city was the longest of the First World War, and the only one that France fought alone

# Hell on Earth



# The battle of Verdun

**T**he Great War centenaries roll on, rather like a creeping barrage. In Britain in 2015 the main target was Gallipoli; in 2016 it will be the Somme. The opening day of that battle, 1 July 1916, was the worst disaster in the history of the British Army. Nearly 20,000 men were killed.

But in 2016 the French will commemorate a different battle, hardly known in Britain. Verdun was a 10-month slugging match lasting from February to December 1916. It became *the* battle of the war for France: fought on home soil for a city fabled in French history. Serving there at one time or another were 75 per cent of the French army on the western front in 1916. “*J’ai fait Verdun*” (I did Verdun), *poilus* (the slang name for French infantrymen) would say laconically. Nothing had to be added.

For the French, *La Grande Guerre* had a simple moral clarity. The German army invaded France in August 1914. Although Paris was saved, 10 *départements* in north-east France remained under German occupation – their people and resources ruthlessly exploited by *les Boches*. For most French people, 1914–18 remains essentially a war that was about national liberation.

After the western front congealed into trenches at the end of 1914, both sides looked for ways to resume open warfare – the kind of fighting for which generals of that era had been trained. In 1915 the French mounted major offensives in Artois and Champagne, supported by the British at Loos in Belgium. Their losses were huge and the territorial gains negligible.

In 1916, conscious that America might soon be drawn into the war in support of the British and French, it was the Germans who tried to loosen the logjam in the west, and one German in particular: General Erich von Falkenhayn, chief of the General Staff. His stereotypically ruthless ‘Prussian’ image – close-cropped, hard-eyed – masked a fatally indecisive character. Verdun started as Falkenhayn’s brainchild, but it developed a satanic life of its own.

Falkenhayn’s intentions remain opaque. After the war he claimed that he wrote a memo for the kaiser at Christmas 1915 setting out a deliberate plan to bleed to death (*verbluten*) the French army by targeting Verdun – a fortress city on the river Meuse in a quiet part of the western front south-east of the Somme. Here the



**“Soldiers deserted, and civilians fled in a flood of cars, carts and prams that foreshadowed the hell of 1940”**

French line formed a salient, hernia-like in shape, which stuck out into German-controlled territory. Along the wooded heights to the north on both banks of the river the French had built a web of forts and defences to protect the city itself, but these had been stripped of men and supplies by the French supreme commander, General Josef Joffre, to reinforce active parts of the front. So the vulnerability of Verdun, and its proximity to German railheads, made the city a plausible military target.

On paper the plan looks clear and simple.

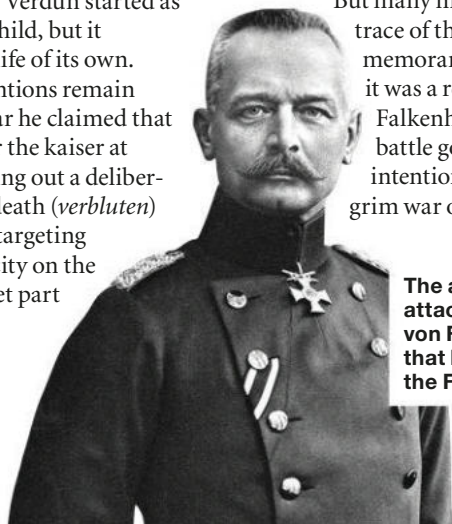
But many historians, unable to find any trace of the so-called Christmas memorandum, have concluded that it was a retrospective concoction by Falkenhayn to pretend, once the battle got bogged down, that his intention had always been to fight a grim war of attrition (*Ermattungskrieg*).

In fact, Falkenhayn never seems to have expected to take Verdun itself, whatever his troops were told for morale reasons. Nor did he provide the resources necessary for a decisive breakthrough, attacking initially only the forts on the right (east) bank. Arguably he intended Verdun as a large but controlled offensive to drain the enemy at relatively small cost to his own forces, with the twin aims of forcing the French to transfer troops to Verdun and the British to mount a diversionary attack further north. This might loosen up the main part of the front, allowing the Germans to take the offensive with devastating effect.

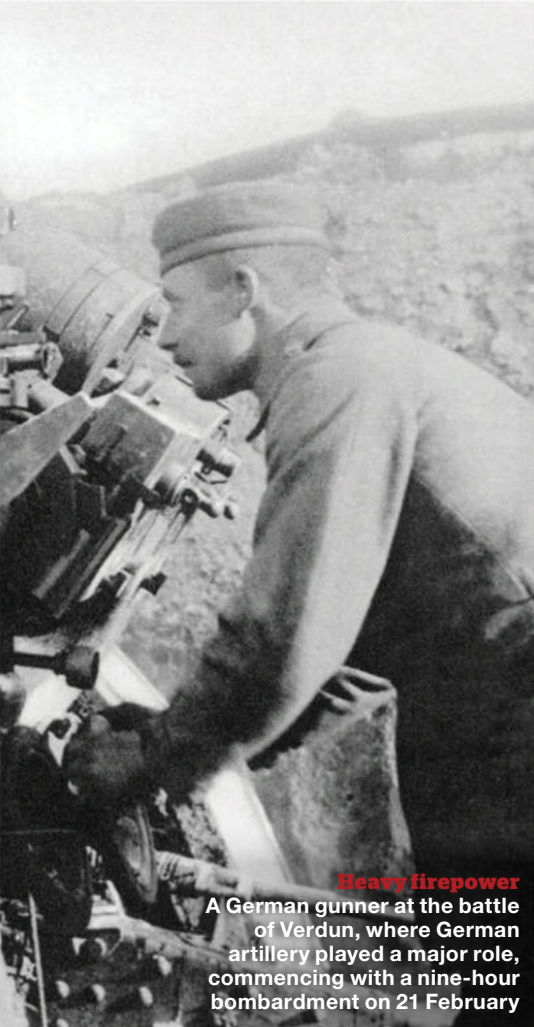
## ‘Bite-and-hold’ offensive

Ironically, one part of Falkenhayn’s scenario did come true: the British-French offensive on the Somme, brought forward in its start-date, was intended to ease the pressure on France at Verdun. Although Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, the supreme British commander, toyed with hopes of a breakout, his subordinate General Sir Henry Rawlinson envisaged the Somme as a ‘bite and hold’ offensive, rather like Falkenhayn’s initial conception at Verdun.

**The architect of Germany’s attack on Verdun was Erich von Falkenhayn, who claimed that he planned to bleed the French army to death**







**Heavy firepower**  
A German gunner at the battle of Verdun, where German artillery played a major role, commencing with a nine-hour bombardment on 21 February

The German plan, codenamed *Gericht* (judgment), was executed in less than two months. Falkenhayn allocated to the initial assault only nine infantry divisions of the German 5th Army commanded by Crown Prince Wilhelm, the kaiser's son, whose playboy lifestyle and gangling appearance earned him the British nickname 'the Clown Prince'. By contrast Falkenhayn did not stint on artillery, which he seems to have expected to do most of the work. Some 1,200 pieces were assembled to saturate a front of little more than eight miles. This was pounded by everything from huge 420mm mortars (called 'Big Berthas' by the British), to blast the French forts, to the dreaded *Minenwerfer*, weapons that tossed canisters of mines in a slow tumbling motion through the air to clear out barbed wire, bunkers and bodies.

Delayed by snowstorms, the onslaught began at 0712 hours on 21 February 1916 around the Bois des Caures. To German astonishment, the initial nine-hour bombardment did not eliminate all resistance but after three days of hard fighting in bitter cold they had penetrated the strong French front line and were up against weaker defences and second-rate troops.

The day of 25 February was one of disaster for France. Key to the network of forts guarding Verdun was Douaumont – a polygon of stone and reinforced concrete, sunk into the ground and surrounded by a

deep ditch, which crowned the highest point of the right bank's defences. Looking up at its long, angular shape, German soldiers nicknamed Douaumont 'the coffin lid' (*der Sargdeckel*); the French public assumed the fort was impregnable. But in fact Joffre's asset-stripping in 1915 had reduced it to little more than a barracks, with a handful of men under an elderly warrant officer. When soldiers from the 24th Brandenburg Infantry Regiment neared Fort Douaumont around 1500 hours on the 25th, French resistance melted away and the Germans were soon inside, rounding up its shell-shocked garrison in a couple of hours.

"*Douaumont ist gefallen!*" trumpeted the headlines next day in the Reich. Schools closed and church bells rang out in jubilation. Shocked by the news, French soldiers began to desert and civilians were ordered to evacuate Verdun, fleeing in a chaotic flood of cars, carts and prams that foreshadowed the hell of 1940.

### Fear of a French rout

Joffre's deputy, General Édouard de Castelnau, raced to Verdun to see the situation for himself. Although there might be a military case for conceding the right bank, even Verdun itself, and falling back to stronger positions further south, Castelnau knew that retreat could easily turn into rout. So he stiffened the defenders and moved the French 2nd Army – already out of the line to prepare for the Somme – into the sector under its commander General Philippe Pétain. Although in direct command for only 10 weeks, Pétain played a decisive role in the battle, earning the title Saviour of Verdun.

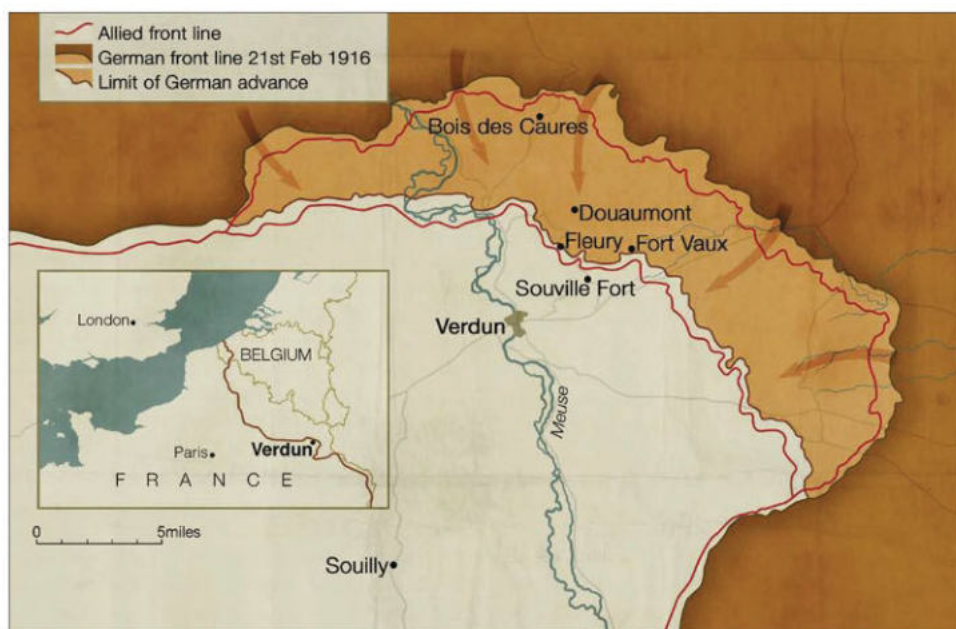
(His image, of course, would change dramatically after 1940 when he led the notorious Vichy regime.)

Pétain, though no military genius, proved the man for that moment. In contrast with the attacking philosophy of most generals of the time, he was defensive-minded: his maxim, in the era of industrialised warfare, was 'firepower kills' (*le feu tue*). Pétain consolidated the French artillery, previously in small groups, into a unified system under his overall direction to sweep the whole battlefield. To improve morale, he instituted a pattern of rapid troop rotation – ideally only eight days in the front line – which is why so many French soldiers served at Verdun. And he made a point of standing outside his command post at the town hall in Souilly, to be seen by his men as they marched up to Verdun or straggled back.

Logistics were crucial. Pétain's staff turned a country road from Bar-le-Duc, the nearest railhead, into a ruthlessly managed supply artery, with an up and a down-lane from which any broken-down truck was pushed off into the ditch. By night, said one observer, the convoys of vehicles looked like "the folds of some gigantic and luminous serpent". The road became sanctified in French myth and memory as the *Voie Sacrée* – the sacred way to the Calvary of Verdun.

By March, Falkenhayn had been obliged to extend his assault to the left (west) bank of the Meuse, with the sinisterly named ridge *Le Mort-Homme* a prime German target. This fell at the end of May but savage fighting on the right bank still ebbed to and fro.

Falkenhayn made his last big push on



**The crucible** Our map shows German advances during the Verdun campaign. It was 8 November 1918 before the Allies evicted the Germans completely from their original gains





A soldier and horse wearing gas masks at Verdun, a battle that, says David Reynolds, "came to encapsulate France's war, or the war the French chose to remember"





The heaped bones of soldiers killed at Verdun. Some 750,000 French and German troops lost their lives, were wounded or went missing during the battle

## “Verdun, one might say, was the Stalingrad of the First World War”

23 June, down the ridge south-west from Douaumont and against the final defences before Verdun, using phosgene gas for the first time. A colour guard and band were ready to head a ceremonial entry into the city, and the kaiser waited in the wings. But, despite the total destruction of the village of Fleury, that onslaught failed. Thereafter Falkenhayn pulled back onto the defensive, increasingly obliged to divert men and supplies to the Somme, where the British-French offensive began on 1 July.

Once they were no longer attacking, it would have been rational for the Germans to withdraw from the glutinous, shell-pocked wasteland around Douaumont to stronger defensive positions. But ceding ground that had been gained at such appalling cost would have had, to quote the crown prince, “an immeasurably disastrous effect” on morale. So, like the French in February, the Germans decided that they could not be seen to fall back. Verdun, one might say, was the Stalingrad of the First World War.

During the autumn the French, at great cost, worked their way back towards Douaumont and on 24 October 1916 the fort was recaptured after a brilliantly calibrated creeping barrage. For France, that day of victory – their most spectacular since the Marne in 1914, and precise revenge for 25 February – symbolised the end of the battle of Verdun. But fighting on the right bank continued until nearly Christmas, while Mort-Homme and other left-bank strongholds were not recovered until August 1917. The Germans weren’t evicted from their original gains in the Bois des Caures until 8 November 1918 – ironically, not by French infantrymen but by American ‘doughboys’.

Total losses are hard to enumerate precisely

but credible estimates suggest around 375,000 killed, wounded and missing on each side. So, whatever Falkenhayn intended, Verdun bled the Germans as much the French. Putting Verdun together with the equally inconclusive battle of the Somme, Britain and France, on one side, and Germany, on the other, each lost around 1 million men, including their most experienced junior officers and NCOs. Although it is reasonable to say that these losses drained Germany more than the Entente, the German army fought on for another two years and fell apart only after going for broke in the spring offensives of 1918.

In November 1918 France came out on the winning side in a war of alliances. Verdun was both the longest battle of 1914–18 and also the only one that the French fought entirely alone. So Verdun came to encapsulate France’s war, or the war the French chose to remember. **H**

**David Reynolds** is professor of international history at the University of Cambridge and has presented several BBC TV and radio programmes

### DISCOVER MORE

#### BOOK

► **The Long Shadow: The Great War and the Twentieth Century** by David Reynolds (Simon and Schuster, 2013)

#### RADIO

► David Reynolds’ series on **Verdun** begins on BBC Radio 4 in February



#### EVENT

► David is speaking at our **First World War in 1916 Day**. Turn to page 54 for details

## Verdun today

How to learn more about the titanic Franco-German clash 100 years on

### What not to miss on a visit to Verdun

The prime stop of a visit must be Douaumont where the National Cemetery and the Ossuary – a bizarre combination of art deco and pseudo Romanesque, built to house the hundreds of thousands of bones that littered the battlefield – vividly convey the sacred place of Verdun in French memory in the 1920s and 1930s. The best-preserved forts are Douaumont and Fort Vaux – both offer good vantage points to grasp the contours of this now wooded battlefield.

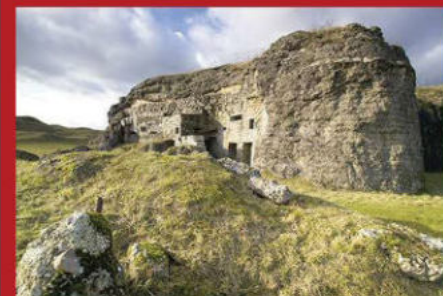
Nine *villages détruits* were never rebuilt. Cleared of the rubble, with the 1914 street plans neatly marked out, they serve as mute but eloquent reminders of the carnage and chaos. Like the soldiers in the cemeteries, each village is deemed to have ‘died for France’ (*mort pour la France*) – a designation that has no parallel in the lexicon of British remembrance. Douaumont (where Charles de Gaulle was taken prisoner) and Fleury are the most evocative.

Close to the latter is the Memorial de Verdun, built in the 1960s to house veterans’ memorabilia and celebrate a passing generation of heroes, but remodelled for 2016 as a research centre, an interactive museum and a place of Franco-German reconciliation.

### The best books about the battle

Invaluable aids when visiting are the books by battlefield historian Christina Holstein, especially *Walking Verdun* (Pen & Sword, 2009) and *Fort Douaumont* (revised, Pen & Sword, 2014), whose walks and maps have descriptions of key moments.

Among many accounts of the battle, *The Price of Glory* by Alistair Horne, first published in 1962, is a classic (Penguin, 1993). Another perceptive study is *The Road to Verdun* by Ian Ousby (Anchor, 2003). Recent works for the centenary include *Verdun* by Paul Jankowski (OUP, 2014).



The ‘impregnable’ fort at Douaumont, which Germans renamed ‘the coffin lid’



## OUR FIRST WORLD WAR

# Women in war

In part 21 of his personal testimony series, **Peter Hart** takes us to February 1916. Women were doing their bit, working in factories, in canteens and as nurses behind the lines in battle-scarred Europe. Peter will be tracing the experiences of 20 people who lived through the First World War - via interviews, letters and diary entries - as its centenary progresses

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JAMES ALBON



A female acetylene welder at work in an aircraft factory during the First World War



### Gabrielle 'Bobby' West

Gabrielle West was born in 1890. At the start of the war she lived with her parents at Selsley, Gloucestershire. A member of the Voluntary Aid Detachment of the Red Cross, she helped in accommodating refugees and also cooked and cleaned at Standish hospital.

**'Bobby' was looking for paid employment and in early 1916 she took a position setting up a canteen for the mainly female workers employed at the Royal Aircraft Factory at Farnborough, Hampshire. They had to start from scratch, but by dint of hard work they soon got the place up and running. An empty barrack room was swiftly converted into a plausible kitchen and mess room.**

“We found that there was hardly any gas pressure, so that it took hours to get the potatoes to boil and it seemed almost impossible to get the meat to roast. And if you light more than two of the five comic little stoves, they all go out. However, things did get done somehow but we only sold about six plates of meat and no pudding. At tea we had rather more to do but not a great deal, but still, we don't feel a bit discouraged.

**As the canteen became more popular Bobby began to distinguish between the different types of women workers at the factory.**

“There are the 'Welders' who join the metal parts of the planes by means of strong acetylene blow lamps. These give out such dazzling sparks and flames that they have to wear dark blue, almost black goggles.

They also wear blue linen overalls and caps. Then there are the 'Dope' girls. They varnish the planes with fast drying, very poisonous varnish. It affects the liver, therefore the girls thus employed are under medical supervision, have to drink large quantities of lime juice and lemonade, must not eat in the dope room, must wash before meals, etc.

But the majority are 'Cody's girls'. Mr Cody is the foreman of the 'shop' where the planes are covered with linen. His uncle was 'Buffalo Bill'. He is an awful little bounder but quite amiable. First of all the linen is passed over a glass topped table, with a kind of green tent over it and a powerful electric light under the glass. In this way any little hole or weak spot is detected and marked.

After this the holes are 'patched', that is a little square of stuff with frizzled out edges is pasted over them. If there is the least fault in the linen of a plane, there is the danger that the wind whistling through it may make it tear right across. Then the plane is covered with linen in a very neat and clever sort of way. Then it is 'doped' or varnished all over three or four times in succession. This makes the linen taut like parchment, and also waterproof.





## Dolly Shepherd

When war broke out, 27-year-old Elizabeth 'Dolly' Shepherd was a recently retired professional parachutist.

**After a daring prewar act as a parachutist, Dolly Shepherd was fully involved in various types of war work. In the day she worked for the War Office driving a munitions lorry.**

“I used to drive a ton and a half lorry and I used to take steel rods and [shell] nose-cap forgings and all kinds of things to the various factories.

It was a Renault lorry, one of the early ones, and it was gravity-fed [a method of supplying the fuel]. One day I had a whole load of brass rods and I was going up a hill and I hadn't got enough petrol in it! Of course being gravity-fed I had to turn round and back up the hill! It must have looked silly, but I couldn't help it.

Then one day I had to take some stuff into the Mint. They loaded me up with a load of – I didn't know what it was – just loaded me up. I had to drive to the docks and they unloaded.

After they'd done it they said: “Do you know what you've been carrying?” I said: “No!” “You've been carrying gold ingots!” They were all painted white you see and I just thought that it was something to do with munitions!



## Sister Kate Luard

Kate Luard was born in 1872. She volunteered to join the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service in 1914, and was dispatched to France, where she served on ambulance trains, then at a field ambulance behind the line.

**Kate Luard was serving as a nurse with No 6 Casualty Clearing hospital at Lillers in France. In late February 1916 she was dealing with the case of Lieutenant Malcolm Henderson of 18 Squadron, Royal Flying Corps, who had been dramatically shot down on 20 February by anti-aircraft fire while on a photographic reconnaissance mission with his observer Lieutenant OJF Scholte.**

“At two o'clock in the afternoon a Hun anti-aircraft shell hit one of our fighting machines at a height of 7,000 feet. It blew the left leg off the pilot, Malcolm Henderson, who then landed his machine safely, close to our front trenches. The enemy shelled it furiously. A medical officer was the first man to reach them: he finished cutting off the leg then and there – it was “just slush”, the boy told me. Then the observer (unhurt) seized one of the precious machine guns and the boy with his leg off seized the other under his arm, and, supported by the doctor, hopped 20 yards with it to the nearest trench.

He arrived at my officers' hospital at 5pm, three hours after he was hit, cheery as ever. He had a very bad night from shock, but revived this morning and had a big operation on his ghastly remains of a leg, just below the knee, and has been very bad since. But he must be pulled round somehow. All sorts of flying people come to ask how he is. The colonel told him he'd been recommended for the VC. “Oh, that's absolutely childish!” he said. We talked this morning about the wonderful new leg he would have. “Perhaps I shall fly


again,” he said hopefully. He was telling another boy who went down today that he'd just got “an expensive pair of new boots” that he'd never worn: “Just my luck.”

**The young pilot had caught Kate's attention, but it soon became apparent that he might not survive his ordeal.**

“The flying boy is very ill; gas gangrene has set in and he is not in a condition to survive another amputation higher up – so all we can do is to try and arrest the gangrene by the saline drip open method treatment.

**But a couple of days later there was good news.**

“The flying boy is better, thank heaven. The drip treatment is doing wonders, and he is getting over the shock. He's a tall, hefty lad, over 12 stone, and has a strong and innocent face of peculiar charm, age 24. He showed me with loud cackles the man in *Punch* who said one of the compensations of having a wooden leg was that you could keep up your socks with drawing-pins!

**The story would have a happy ending for – against the odds – Henderson survived his attack of gangrene and was eventually sent off in a hospital train to Blighty on 12 March. Although he was not in the end awarded the Victoria Cross, he did receive the Distinguished Service Order. An impressive career in the RAF followed and he commanded the No 14 Fighter Group during the Battle of Britain. He died in 1978. **



A First World War biplane used for reconnaissance in France

***“He showed me with loud cackles the man in Punch who said one of the compensations of having a wooden leg was that you could keep up your socks with drawing-pins!”***

Peter Hart is the oral historian at the Imperial War Museum. He will be speaking at *BBC History Magazine's* First World War in 1916 Day see [historyextra.com/bbchistorymagazine/event/first-world-war-1916-day](http://historyextra.com/bbchistorymagazine/event/first-world-war-1916-day)

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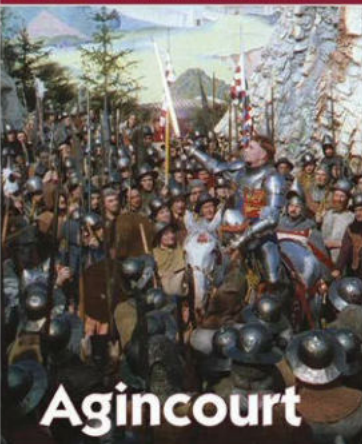




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Photo of Howard Carter peering into the gilded shrines surrounding Tutankhamun's tomb.

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INTERVIEW  
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Experts discuss and review the latest history releases

# BOOKS



Simon Sebag Montefiore  
photographed at his home in  
London. "To be tsar, you had to  
be a generalissimo, a pope and  
a politician, and nobody could  
do it – with the exception of  
Peter the Great," he says



## INTERVIEW / SIMON SEBAG MONTEFIORE

*"Reading this book will hopefully help  
people understand Putin's Russia"*

Simon Sebag Montefiore's new book explores the dramatic, brutal world of the centuries-spanning Romanov dynasty – and shows why it matters today. **Matt Elton** met up with him to find out more

HELEN ATKINSON



## PROFILE SIMON SEBAG MONTEFIORE

Montefiore studied history at Gonville and Caius College, University of Cambridge, before going on to work as a banker and journalist. He has written historical fiction – including *One Night in Winter* (Century, 2013) – and non-fiction, with *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* (2003) and *Young Stalin* (2007, both Weidenfeld and Nicolson) winning major awards. He lives in London with his family.

### IN CONTEXT

The Romanov dynasty ruled Russia for more than 300 years from 1613 to 1917. From its first tsar, Michael I (1596–1645), the often violently contested line featured a diverse array of autocrats. Peter the Great (1672–1725) is known for his court's extravagance; Catherine the Great (1729–96) was Russia's longest-serving female leader; Alexander I (1777–1825) ruled during the the Napoleonic Wars and Alexander II (1818–81) is known for his liberal reforms. The dynasty ended in 1917 with the forced abdication of Nicholas II who was later executed with his family by revolutionary forces.

### What's your take on the earliest days of the Romanov dynasty?

The first Romanov to be made tsar was Michael I, and it was a job that nobody wanted to go near. He was a hopeless ruler, really, but in a Russia filled with swaggering warlords, the very fact that he was young and innocent, and his links to the old dynasty – his great-aunt Anastasia was the first wife of Ivan the Terrible – made him a perfect tsar.

It's hard to get a clear sense of his personality, but there were lots of strong characters around him, including his father – the real power behind his reign. But when you're studying the Romanovs, it's important to remember that it's not that different from what's happening in England or other powers at the time. We're often very smug about the supposed primitiveness of Russian autocracy, but even in western democracies prime ministers have entourages: look at Tony Blair's 'sofa government', for instance.

### The succession was notably fraught. What frailties do you think it reveals about the regime?

The tsar's deathbeds were always fraught because there was no fixed succession until the 1790s. Until then, a tsar could choose any member of the family to succeed to the throne – but as we know from Tony Blair, Margaret Thatcher, and many other cases, nobody wants to name their successor.

So the problem was that anyone could say that the dying tsar had whispered something to them. Successions in autocracies, as in democracies, are great for historians analysing how regimes really work, because everything came down to the fundamentals of power.

### How important was choosing a wife, and how did that happen?

The selection took the form of a 'brideshow', a very exotic ritual that was literally a beauty contest. All of the pretty girls were invited to Moscow and went through various rounds until the final viewing when the tsar started to choose his favourites. The point of the brideshow was that the girls weren't related to, or connected to, anyone important, so they were 'safe'. But, of course, behind the scenes people were backing different girls.

### There are some huge characters in this story. Are there any that haven't gained enough attention elsewhere?

Alexander I is the most underrated tsar. He was a massive figure of great effectiveness, but because Napoleon described him as a feckless weakling, everyone else followed that line. He was slightly unbalanced and given to crazy ideas, and of course he was involved in the killing of his father – which is always a problem with anybody – but actually, once he learned how to rule, he was very effective.

The key thing was not to over-interfere in military matters, because he wasn't a great commander – but then very few of the Romanovs were very good generals, despite the fact that they all wanted to be. Only Peter the Great properly understood military matters, but he was brilliant in every way. Alexander I turned out to be a great diplomat, and put together the coalition that destroyed Napoleon. He led an army from Moscow to Paris, which is incredible.

### Because they had absolute power, tsars had to manage a huge number of things at once. How did they do that?

The problem was that, to be tsar, you had to be a generalissimo, a pope and a politician.

*"That was a huge flaw in the Romanov regime: that you couldn't really have a brilliant first minister"*

Nobody could do it – with the exception of Peter the Great, but he had his own problems: he was a demented sadist as well. You just couldn't do everything.

That was a huge flaw in the whole regime: you couldn't really have a brilliant first minister. You couldn't have a Disraeli or a Bismarck, because that would undermine the autocracy – and yet nobody was capable of doing it themselves.

### So you had to be tough to flourish in this position – almost brutal.

Yes, you did. You were expected to be severe, but you had to be consistent. You couldn't just turn on people: Paul I (1754–1801), for instance, would be kind to someone one day and cruel the next. He sacked some people three or four times only for them to be promoted higher each time they came back, and in the end they decided that he had to be killed. His murder was a classic in how not to handle the court.

### What characteristics did you need to get ahead at the Romanov court?

Incredible duplicity and an ability to conspire were essential. Ultimately, you had to attract the tsar, and one way of doing that was by delivering a victory – but that made you a threat to the tsar, too.

A better way, the old-fashioned way, was to have the tsar fall in love with you. But *that* didn't necessarily give you any power at all, depending on the tsar.

The conventional argument is that this system risked promoting idiots, but two of the greatest ministers of the Romanov dynasty – Ivan Shuvalov, favourite of the 18th-century empress Elizaveta, and Grigoy Potemkin, favourite of Catherine the Great – started out as lovers of tsarinas, so that wasn't necessarily the case.

### How early in Peter the Great's life can we tell that he was going to be extraordinary?

Really early. He was always exceptional. Of course, it wouldn't have taken a great shift in personality for him to have just been an eccentric madman. But he was so talented: he knew how to do everything, he was so visionary. What's interesting is that he didn't come out of nothing: his father, Aleksey Mikhailovich, who no one has heard of now, had similar interests and qualities.





Alexander III meets with rural elders in this 19th-century portrait. Montefiore contrasts such “wiser tsars, who were more flexible” with Nicholas II and his wife, Alexandra, who he argues both made serious mistakes in the dying days of the dynasty

### Much has been made of Peter’s court’s decadence. How essential was it to his rule and success?

I’m not sure that it was really necessary! It was totally bizarre. There were naked old men walking around with dildos, dancing dwarves, giants. His was a carnival court. But it was useful because it meant that his barons, counts and generals were all terrified of him. He would turn in a moment from being playful to accusing them of corruption or treachery. Often his dinners ended up as mass brawls: one of his top ministers stabbed someone to death with a fork and was never punished. What it was really about, I think, was showing that the tsar was a monarch of exceptional and extraordinary gifts, blessed by god, who could do anything he wanted in the world. But it was also a lot of fun for him!

### What’s your take on Peter’s relationship with his wife, Catherine?

It’s an amazing example of his supreme power: that he could just take this promiscuous peasant girl and literally make her an empress. There’s no other example in European history of someone going that far, from camp follower to legitimate crowned empress in their own right.

### What was Peter’s greatest legacy?

The battle of Poltava against Sweden in 1709. It made Russia an empire, and meant that it got the Baltic. It changed the shape of Europe: it made everything possible for

Russia, and made the nation a military power. It was one of the great decisive battles in European history.

### Another famous figure is, of course, Catherine the Great. What were her greatest strengths?

She was possessed by all the great qualities of a ruler. Her only disadvantage was that she was a woman in a male-dominated era. She couldn’t beat people up or command armies, but she was a master of everything. She was supremely intelligent; totally charming; very manipulative, obviously; absolutely ruthless when she needed to be. But she was essentially decent, although that sounds contradictory. She really tried, whenever possible, to be humane in a way that nobody in Russia has really much bothered to do before or since.

And as for the rumours about her sexual appetite, the key thing about her is what she said herself: that she had to be in love every minute. She took beautiful young men of 20 years old because she could, and they all wanted to be in that position. But walking around behind an old lady all day while surrounded by beautiful ladies-in-waiting led to great unhappiness. In the end they all ran off, but she was always incredibly generous and never took revenge.

### Moving ahead to the 19th-century reign of Alexander II, how far can we see this as a beacon of liberalness?

He is by far the most appealing of the tsars,

*“Peter the Great’s dinners often ended up as mass brawls. One of his ministers stabbed someone to death with a fork”*

especially the later ones. He was thoughtful, kind to everyone, and actually very skilled.

But he didn’t have the consistency or the endurance to keep it up for his entire rule. That was a problem with the job: as we know from our own leaders, they’re barking mad after 10 years in power – and that’s not even supreme power. So after 15 or 20 years, these guys were exhausted. He had great potential, but because he swung back to reactionary policies, he lost a lot of support. He’s a great tragic figure, a very lovable man, and one of my favourites.

### What were the main crisis points in the Romanov years?

A big crisis was the invasion of Russia by Charles XII of Sweden in 1708. If Peter the Great had lost Poltava the following year, Europe could now look very different. We could have a huge Sweden controlling the whole Baltic area. It now seems totally





COMING SOON...

"Next issue, I'll be talking to Ben Wilson about **Heyday**, his study of how the innovations of the 1850s shaped today's world. Plus, our reviewers will be considering books including an ambitious one-volume take on the Holy Roman Empire and a look at India through the voices of its people." *Matt Elton, reviews editor*

impossible – it seems obvious Russia was always going to be this giant bear – but, of course, everything's possible.

The French invasion of Russia in 1812 was a big crisis. The Russians could have lost everything, but they survived the fall of Moscow, which was amazing. Alexander I had found the strength in his character and was *not* going to make peace with Napoleon.

**Considering the dynasty's decline, do you think it's right to see it as a victim of its own earlier success?**

The dynasty had been so successful that there was increasing resistance to fundamentally changing anything. That was a major factor in its failure.

It's very easy to say that the later tsars got everything wrong, but their jobs were actually much more complicated and harder to do than anyone thought, and they were very likely to be overthrown – or worse – if they got something wrong. The dilemmas of the final tsar, Nicholas II, were extremely difficult to sort out, for instance, and I'm not sure that *anyone* would have got them right.

**What is your view of Nicholas II and his wife, Alexandra?**

The thing about Nicholas and Alexandra – Nicky and Alix – is that they have become

an industry in their own right. But if you look at the millions of books written about them, most are about what they wore, where they went on holiday, the children's illnesses, and all that sort of stuff. And all of that's very fascinating – a window into a shipwrecked world – but you have to look at the politics too. It's impossible not to think about them without knowing how it all ended, but we have to try.

Nicholas was moderately successful for his first 10 years and it is easy to forget that he ruled in total for 22 years – which is a long time – despite war, revolution and folly. But they were monumental failures. The question, of course, is why. In order to answer it, I wanted to look at them as politicians, not just as lovers and a happy couple with children – even though we feel

*"All of Romanov history is the story of trying to gain control of Ukraine – that's how important it is to the Russians"*

great sympathy for them because of their assassination by Bolshevik forces in 1918.

I'm not looking at them through rose-tinted spectacles, either. Alix became more and more political, grew far too powerful, a disastrous meddler. She was vindictive, extremely unwise, and so hysterical that she was close to madness.

If Alexandra had died after 10 years, Nicholas may have been regarded as quite a successful monarch, but the problem was that he gave more and more power to her. They didn't see themselves as politicians: they said that they were sacred monarchs and were utterly rigid in their view of themselves, while wiser tsars such as Alexanders I or II – or even Alexander III – were more flexible. But Nicholas was utterly rigid and also duplicitous with everyone: part of that was shyness, which we can forgive, but part of it was a sort of slyness that he thought he could do what he wanted. So they both definitely made monumental errors all the way through.

**How would you like to change our view of this dynasty, this period, and this country?**

The more we can understand how Russia sees itself, its soul and aspirations, the more we will be able to handle the world today. And what happened from Michael I onward is a huge part of that history.

You see many of the same interests then that you see in Russia today. For example, the whole of Romanov history is the story of trying to gain control of Ukraine. That's how important the country is to them. Crimea, the place where the grand prince of Kiev converted to Orthodoxy, where Catherine the Great and Potemkin launched their fleet at Sebastopol, these are the things that made Russia a Middle-Eastern power. In 1772, Catherine's fleet was bombarding Syrian ports and occupying Beirut, which brings us right up to the Russian presence in Syria today.

So all around there are these huge echoes

in the past, and reading this book will hopefully help people understand Putin's Russia today. **H**

**The Romanovs, 1613–1918**  
by Simon Sebag Montefiore  
(W&N, 608 pages, £25)



Simon Sebag Montefiore talks to our reviews editor, Matt Elton. "The more we understand how Russia sees itself, the more we will be able to handle the world today," he says



HELEN ATKINSON





Adolf Hitler declares war on the US in 1941. David Cesarani's book argues that this decision "had a significant bearing on his resolution to destroy 'international Jewry'," says Lisa Pine

## The final word?

**LISA PINE** praises a bold new account of the Holocaust, exploring its causes and impacts, written by a late expert in the field

### Final Solution: The Fate of the Jews 1933-1949

by David Cesarani

Pan Macmillan, 800 pages, £30



In this impressive book, David Cesarani addresses the divergence between presentations of the Holocaust in popular culture, education and commemoration, and the findings of academic research. Never one to shy

away from controversy, Cesarani presents a challenging new interpretation of the

'final solution'. Not all will agree with him, but then this is a field rife with scholarly debate.

This is a carefully researched book, based on a wide range of primary sources as well as Cesarani's mastery of the complex secondary literature on this subject. He convincingly argues that the Holocaust has been portrayed by means of a set of widely accepted assumptions or preconceptions, and sets out "to challenge the traditional concept and periodisation that have until now framed constructions of the Holocaust".

Cesarani demonstrates how anti-Semitic measures were characterised by "improvisa-

tion and muddle" and contests whether Nazi anti-Jewish policy was indeed "systematic, consistent or even premeditated". Even ghettoisation, he contends, was muddled and only inconsistently implemented. He also argues that Holocaust historians have "missed the single most important thing that determined the fate of the Jews": namely, the war, and that "military exigencies drove anti-Jewish policy, not the other way round".

Cesarani contends that, in the end, "the course of the war, rather than decisions within the framework of anti-Jewish policy, triggered the descent into a Europe-wide genocide". In particular, military failure in the Russian campaign brought with it a radicalisation of anti-Semitic measures, and Hitler's decision to declare war on the US had a significant bearing on his resolution to destroy 'international Jewry'.

Yet, Cesarani argues, the Nazi genocide of the Jews, as it emerged from the spring of 1942 onwards, was no less haphazard. He shows how the 'final solution' as a pan-European project evolved slowly and erratically after the Wannsee Conference of senior Nazi officials in January 1942. Describing it as "low cost and low-tech," he analyses the construction and running of each of the death camps and shows that even the building and development of Auschwitz – which has become iconic in defining popular understanding of the Holocaust – was achieved in fits and starts through trial and error.

Cesarani carefully explains the development and impact of Nazi anti-Semitic policies right across Europe. He also makes clear the extent to which the economic exploitation of the Jews and the expropriation of their homes and assets benefited the German population, as well as the allies and collaborators of the Nazis. This widens the circle of those who stood to gain from the persecution and genocide of the Jews.

With this in mind, Cesarani calls into question the idea of bystanders as passive spectators and shows that many were complicit. Plunder, ritualised violence and brutality against Jewish populations in



**"David Cesarani has produced a definitive study of the Holocaust"**





newly occupied territories was a key feature of Nazi expansion. Cesarani suggests that greed, not anti-Semitism, often motivated people's behaviour.

Furthermore, he shows how awkward issues and sensitive subjects have been avoided or glossed over in the historical narrative, and therefore the popular understanding, of the 'final solution'. The constructed narrative, particularly at commemorative events, maintains "a discreet silence over instances of voluntary infanticide, sexual exploitation among the Jews, rape and even cannibalism", he argues. "Yet all these things occurred at times in ghettos, camps, urban hideouts and forest

***"This is a fitting book to remember Cesarani by and testament to his career as a leading expert in his field"***

sanctuaries." And, in another deliberate attempt to shift our preconceptions, he ends his book in 1949 rather than 1945. His epilogue shows that the misery of the Jews did not end neatly in 1945, but that many thousands were placed into 'displaced persons' camps. Jewish survivors did not receive restitution and reparation and, as Cesarani notes, there was "much unfinished business".

This compellingly argued work covers a huge amount of historical ground and prompts us to reconsider many of our preconceived ideas. With his clear, detailed analysis, Cesarani has written a definitive study of the Holocaust that succeeds in bridging the gap between academia and popular understanding. While his untimely death last year meant that he almost certainly had more to write, this is a fitting book by which to remember him and testament to his career as a leading expert in his field. **H**

**Lisa Pine** is reader in history at London South Bank University and editor of *Life and Times in Nazi Germany* (Bloomsbury, 2016)



Leading players in the Cold War meet in 1988. Robert Service's book offers an "important and fascinatingly readable" look at a key period of the 20th century

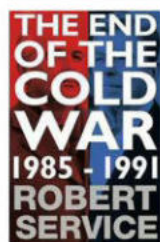
## Bloc busters

**EVAN MAWDSLEY** recommends a new take on the Cold War from 1985 to 1991, and the key figures in the end of an era

### The End of the Cold War

by Robert Service

Macmillan, 562 pages, £25



In hindsight, the late 1980s and early 1990s were among the most significant years of the century. The governments of the US and the Soviet Union made key agreements about armaments, especially

strategic nuclear weapons. At the same time, changes in the communist sphere broke up the eastern European bloc and, in 1991, the Soviet Union itself.

As Robert Service admits, this is hardly a neglected topic. Furthermore, this is his first book exclusively about international relations: he has written much about the government and policy of the Soviet Union, but not about those of the US. Yet neither of these points need cause the reader concern. Service has unrivalled knowledge of the ideology and structure of the Soviet system (he has, for example, written a definitive three-volume biography of Lenin). Here he demonstrates a mastery of a mass of new archival sources on both sides. This is international history at its best, tracing in detail, with a fine sense of balance, developments within both governments.

George HW Bush may have been president during the final two years, but the key initiatives were taken by others. The central characters are the 'big four': presidents Reagan and Gorbachev and their foreign ministers,

George Shultz and Eduard Shevardnadze. All are sympathetically evaluated: the ministers perhaps get more credit, but they had less to worry about than did their chiefs. Service shows the importance of their ideals and their readiness to bypass internal interest groups. The blossoming of their inter-personal relationships would also prove instrumental.

For Service, the end of the Cold War – the 'improbable peace' – was in no way inevitable. As he points out, very few people on either side thought in the middle of the 1980s that an improvement in relations and a reduction of the strategic rivalry was possible. Neither side's leaders or advisors foresaw the collapse of the east European system, let alone the end of the USSR. Four men set in motion developments that would change the world, but they themselves could not control that change. For Gorbachev and Shevardnadze, great success in one sphere was accompanied by great failure in another.

This volume is both important and fascinatingly readable. It is a big book but not an exhausting one, a good read with no wasted space. Service, probably wisely, does not reflect too much on what was going to happen in the next 25 years after 1991, with the US the 'global hyperpower', or whether world leaders of the 1980s should have attempted an even more forward-looking world view. That, after all, is a different story. **H**

**Evan Mawdsley** is honorary professorial research fellow at the University of Glasgow





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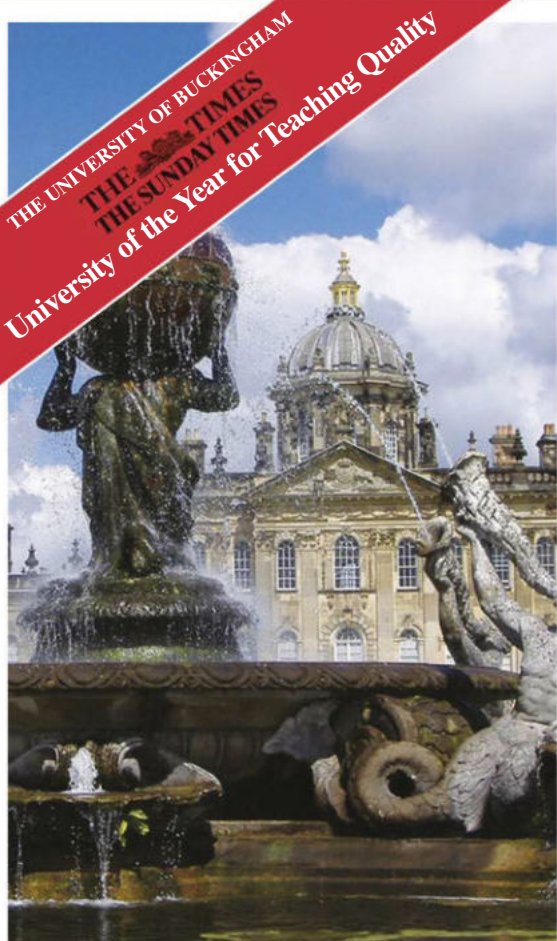
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**LONDON PROGRAMMES**





Margaret Thatcher and Norman Tebbit, then chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, at the 1985 Conservative party conference. The second part of Charles Moore's biography of Thatcher is "an outstanding achievement", says Richard Vinen

## Uncertain times

**RICHARD VINEN** on the second part of a sweeping biography of Margaret Thatcher, spanning the period from 1983 to 1987

### Margaret Thatcher: The Authorized Biography, Vol Two: Everything She Wants

by Charles Moore

Allen Lane, 880 pages, £30



In 1986, Andrew Fox – a 22-year-old bond dealer – wrote to thank Margaret Thatcher for the “irreversible” changes that she had wrought in national attitudes “which offer young people such

opportunities today”. The letter cheered Thatcher, who was far from certain that her victories were irreversible.

It was true that the Falklands War had strengthened Thatcher's position in her own party and helped her secure a large majority in the general election of 1983. The sale of large nationalised industries (which the Tories had hardly dared dream of in 1979) and the deregulation of the City in 1986 transformed the economy. However, defeat at the hands

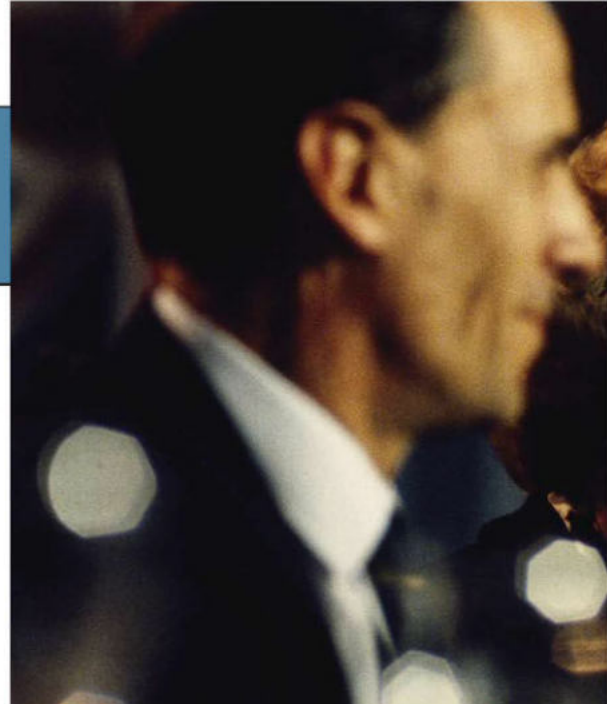
of the miners during the strike of 1984–85, which Thatcher sometimes thought possible, might have brought her down – though victory against them did not bring her much credit either.

In any case, Thatcher rarely had much chance to take stock of her achievements. On days when she took decisions that would later be seen as momentous, she usually handled 15 or 20 other matters as well. Along with everything else, she had to worry about two transcendent issues: whether the Soviet Union would attack, and whether the Conservatives would win the next election.

Moore is well qualified to capture the complexity of the second Thatcher government. Having become editor of *The Spectator* in 1984, he had a ringside seat throughout the period. He has also interviewed hundreds of people – some of his most intriguing suggestions are simply attributed to “private information” – and we see Thatcher through the eyes of the intelligent, articulate people who surrounded her. A curious result of this, however, is that the members of the

British establishment are often treated not as participants but witnesses. Indeed, Moore's habit of giving potted biographies in footnotes means that everyone except Thatcher disappears into a grey blur of public schools and Oxbridge colleges.

Two groups might have been given more attention. In the first are extraordinary cabinet ministers such as Douglas Hurd and Geoffrey Howe. Is it possible that they might have formed a radical government even under a different PM? In the second are civil servants – not just those who became, to all intents and purposes, political advisors, but those, such as Robin Butler, who supported the Thatcherite project while continuing to observe rituals of mandarin disinterest. The defeat of the miners, in particular,



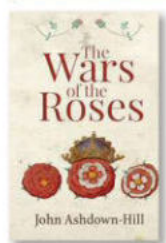
## Challenging a conflict

**CHRIS SKIDMORE** has mixed feelings about an account of the Wars of the Roses from a prolific author on the period

### The Wars of the Roses

by John Ashdown-Hill

Amberley, 336 pages, £20



John Ashdown-Hill is well known for his role in helping to uncover Richard III's remains in 2012. Since then, he has already managed to produce four books exploring the period. This fast-

paced overview of the Wars of the Roses

intends to peel back the “traditional mythology” of the Tudor take on events. Indeed, the book's overriding theme is to challenge the view of the dynastic civil wars as simply a conflict between the houses of York and Lancaster. This is well done, with useful chapters on the private conflicts that scarred the 15th century, and an intriguing discussion of how the Lancastrian red rose emblem adopted by the Tudors could have been influenced by Henry VII's Beaufort ancestry.

Later chapters, on pretenders to the throne, are also captivating. Genealogy is

also never far from the surface of the author's arguments – one gets the sense that Ashdown-Hill's longed-for solution to many historical mysteries can be found in uncovering his subject's DNA – and he asserts that the Lancastrian claim to the throne, having passed into the Portuguese royal family through marriage alliances, was later to be taken up by Philip II as a distant relation even as late as the 1580s.

Meanwhile, perhaps unsurprisingly, Ashdown-Hill's Richard III can do no wrong: apparently he never wanted the throne, while he was “deeply shocked” by the death of his brother, George, Duke of Clarence. Sadly, evidence that suggests otherwise is not weighed up and is instead simply ignored. The belief that Richard was justified in acceding to the

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was surely a collective achievement of the whole British ruling class.

In 1982, a civil servant referred to Thatcher's capacity for generating "seismic uncertainty". By the end of her second term, however, the tectonic plates were beginning to move under her own feet, and the end of the Cold War pulled away a certainty that had governed her whole political life. Shortly after her fall, the bond dealer who had written the fan letter in 1986 left Britain to make a new career – in Vladivostok.

Moore's book is an outstanding achievement and one of those rare works that deserves to be called 'definitive'. **H**

**Richard Vinen** is professor of history at King's College London

throne due to the so-called 'precontract' that Edward IV had made with Lady Eleanor Butler before his marriage to Elizabeth Woodville, for example, is swallowed whole, without consideration to well-rehearsed contrary arguments that this justification was only finally settled upon as the pretext needed for Richard to seize the throne.

Too much space is given to supposition – that Richard suffered from the sweating sickness, causing his defeat at Bosworth, for instance – for this to be considered a truly scholarly account. But for readers wishing to dip their toe into this tumultuous period, Ashdown-Hill offers an engaging tour de force. **H**

**Chris Skidmore** is the author of *Bosworth: The Birth of the Tudors* (W&N, 2013)

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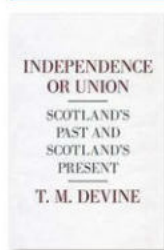
## The Scottish question

**RAB HOUSTON** explores a look at the history of Scotland's relationship with the UK – and how it may shape its future

### Independence or Union: Scotland's Past and Scotland's Present

by **TM Devine**

Allen Lane, 320 pages, £20



Four centuries ago, when James VI of Scotland succeeded Elizabeth I to become James I of England, France and Ireland, modern unitary states barely existed in Europe. Instead, most

political units were composites of diverse peoples and privileges, held together by loyalty to a monarch. The loose British association created in 1603 was made only a little tighter by the Union of Parliaments in 1707, which preserved Scotland's separate systems of private law, religion, education and local government.

Since then, Scotland and England have drawn closer while remaining different, bound in a sometimes ambivalent relationship that nevertheless worked well. Unlike Wales and Ireland, Scotland was never an English colony. Scots embraced union and the economic opportunities that it created, while never losing sight of their distinctive values of voluntarism, self-help and egalitarianism, all embodied in an enduring tradition of left-leaning politics. Their experience exemplifies the competing aspirations towards unity and diversity that remain a constant of European history.

Probably Scotland's best-publicised historian, TM Devine's aim here is to understand present-day Scotland in the context of its past, at a juncture when independence remains an immediate possibility. Those familiar with his

**"TM Devine aims to understand Scotland in context of its past"**

previous publications will recognise both the no-nonsense approach and the material he draws together into a dense narrative of how the fortunes and attitudes of Scots both influenced and depended on a wider British context.

The first half of the book nods towards the 17th century, but covers mostly 1707 to the 1960s; the second half is about the rise of the SNP from then to the present day. The agenda is clearly set out and the prose lucid as the answers to key questions unfold. With its comparative perspective, the book will be useful not only for Scottish readers, but also for anyone in Britain, Europe and the wider world who wants a relatively brief synopsis of how Scotland and the United Kingdom arrived at where they are now.

While the issues around nationalism in the past half-century are new, Devine's approach is traditional and narrow, focusing on politics and economics rather than people and culture. His view is often restricted to Westminster and Holyrood, to politicians and pundits, an introverted perspective shaped by and playing to what he calls 'the commentariat'.

Devine leaves the impression that all Scots are restless for independence, that there is a single 'Scottish Question'. In truth, Scots past and present thought far more about mundane realities such as standards of living, health, education, social welfare and religion than this book would have us believe. National identity, British or Scottish, was only one contingent concern for people whose focus was mostly local and personal.

There is also little sense of Scotland's pronounced geographic, linguistic, social and religious differences, remarkable in so small a country. This means that the book sadly pays scant attention to the widely different opinions of the people of Scotland – and England – about the politics of unity and diversity. **H**

**Rab Houston** is professor of modern history at the University of St Andrews



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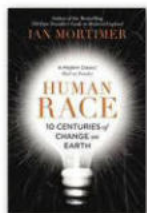
Philip II as seen in a 17th-century portrait. Geoffrey Parker offers a new take on the king's character



## Human Race: 10 Centuries of Change on Earth

by Ian Mortimer

Vintage, 416 pages, £9.99



This is an excellent romp through the past millennium of British (and particularly English) history. As with

all of Ian Mortimer's books, it is highly entertaining, well written and packed with lively characters and surprising facts.

Mortimer opens by asking which of the past 10 centuries saw most change in the ways people lived. The commonsense answer, he observes, is the 20th century; in fact, he adds that "some people laugh at the very idea that I could even consider it to be another". And yet, he wonders, how do we really know which century really changed humanity most?

Each of the 10 chapters that follow takes us through one century, vividly describing what changed (and what didn't). It is fascinating stuff, although at the end of the day Mortimer concludes that the commonsense assumption is

basically right. So much has changed in the past 150 years that "since the mid-19th century we have practically been living on another planet". However, he argues, that does not matter, writing that "the aim of this book is to provoke discussion about... what our extraordinary experiences over the last 10 centuries mean for the human race".

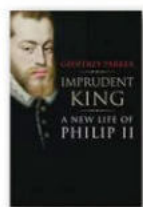
Mortimer concludes that the future looks rather dark. Personally, I think the evidence he musters in fact suggests just the opposite, but that perhaps shows how well he succeeds in his goal of provoking debate.

Ian Morris is the author of *Why the West Rules For Now: The Patterns of History and What They Reveal About the Future* (Profile, 2010)

## Imprudent King: A New Life of Philip II

by Geoffrey Parker

Yale, 456 pages, £14.99



Philip II of Spain, who reigned from 1556 to 1598, is among the most celebrated and notorious

monarchs in European history. Philip was able to aspire to conquer England in 1588, and to interfere elsewhere in Europe and beyond – at one point he was even urged to invade China – in part because he ruled a global empire that stretched from Sicily to the Philippines, bringing resources but also responsibilities and threats.

Philip has understandably attracted numerous biographers, one of whom, commissioned by Philip himself, titled him 'the prudent'. More recent biographers include Geoffrey Parker, a leading authority on Habsburg Spain. This is the paperback release of Parker's second biography of Philip, the writing of which was sparked in part by the availability of new evidence for Philip's reign.

This material allows Parker to challenge the view of Philip put forward by the noted historian Henry Kamen in his 1997 book *Philip of Spain* (Yale). Whereas Kamen's Philip left business to his ministers, Parker emphasises the extent to which Philip, an "obsessive compulsive" personality, was a slave to his paperwork and to micromanagement.

Parker explores this and many other aspects of Philip's character and world view, including what he terms his "messianic imperialism", and the extent to which they made for success, or rather failure – thus questioning the suitability of the epithet 'prudent'. Much of this will be familiar to readers of Parker's *Grand Strategy of Philip II* (Yale, 1998). Nevertheless, this is an up-to-date and very readable biography that helps explain just why this monarch cast such an enduring shadow over his age.

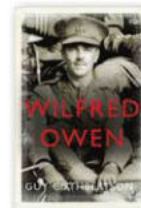
Christopher Storrs is reader in history at the University of Dundee

## PAPERBACKS

### Wilfred Owen

by Guy Cuthbertson

Yale, 352 pages, £10.99



For many people, the poet Wilfred Owen is not just the most famous name associated with the First World War, but the very embodiment of that conflict. So however much modern military historians may harrumph disapprovingly that Owen and his fellow poets of peace, protest and pity were unrepresentative of the mass patriotism of the nation, let alone the feelings of ordinary soldiers, the ubiquitous presence of Owen's haunting poetry on generations of school curricula – and the pacifist sympathies of modern society – mean that his is the name we remember above all others.

By his own admission, Guy Cuthbertson's study is very much a literary appreciation, not a full biography. Freedom from the tyranny of sticking to the facts of Owen's life gives the author liberty to speculate, and even fantasise, about his subject. This leads him up some curious avenues, such as his baseless suggestions that Owen was a closet Catholic (he was an evangelical Protestant turned agnostic) or an unlikely ladies' man (he was very likely gay).

Despite these whimsicalities, Cuthbertson is an acute and perceptive critic of the poetry that made Owen so posthumously celebrated. This book is a valuable addition to the huge library devoted to the war's remarkable literary legacy.

Nigel Jones is the author of books including *Peace and War: Britain in 1914* (Head of Zeus, 2014)





Dutch whalers pursue their prey near Spitsbergen, northern Norway, in this 17th-century painting. Ian McGuire's book "is definitely not a novel for the squeamish"

## FICTION

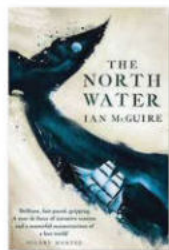
# Waves of violence

**NICK RENNISON** on an unflinching novel that plunges a ship's crew into an icy world of brutality and bloodshed

### The North Water

by Ian McGuire

Scribner, 336 pages, £11.99



Patrick Sumner is a surgeon forced to leave the army and sign on as a ship's doctor on a whaling vessel. Nothing has prepared him for what he finds on board the *Volunteer*

after it sails out of the Humber and into the Arctic. His shipmates are all men brutalised by their trade's hardships, but none is quite like the harpooner Henry Drax. Devoted only to the satisfaction of his basic urges, he is also deviously clever and manipulative. Although his fellow whalers do not know it, Drax is already a murderer and is ready to kill again in pursuit of his own ends.

When Sumner finds evidence that a ship's boy has been sexually assaulted, he reports it to Captain Brownlee. This marks the beginning of a journey into a

nightmare. The captain has particular plans for the voyage, devised in league with the ship's unscrupulous owner, and is only perfunctorily interested in what Sumner has to say. Then fate and Drax step in to create chaos. The ship is lost and the weather closes in on its crew. Stranded in the darkness of an Arctic winter, Sumner and his fellows, with only the ambivalent assistance of the local Inuit, suffer all that nature can throw at them. And the devilish Drax lurks in the background, determined to survive, whatever the costs to others.

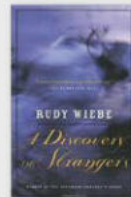
This novel will not be to everybody's taste. Its language is uncompromising, reflecting the everyday obscenities of its characters, and the author depicts the often gruesome violence of his story with unflinching exactitude. This is most definitely not a story for the squeamish. It is, however, an exceptionally powerful narrative of a man driven to the limits of his endurance and, once read, it is unlikely to be forgotten. **H**

**Nick Rennison** is the author of *Carver's Quest* (Corvus, 2013)

## THREE MORE TALES OF THE FROZEN NORTH

### A Discovery of Strangers

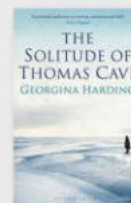
Rudy Wiebe (1994)



Winner of the Governor-General's award, Canada's most prestigious prize for fiction, this novel is based on events during John Franklin's 1819–22 expedition to the Arctic. As European explorers and indigenous peoples meet for the first time, a story of love, greed and murder plays out against the unforgiving backdrop of the ice and snow-filled landscape. Wiebe's novel, written in the different voices of several of its characters, is a powerful and poetic work of historical reconstruction.

### The Solitude of Thomas Cave

Georgina Harding (2007)



This strange and lyrical debut novel unfolds the story of its eponymous central character, a 17th-century whaler who accepts a bet from a shipmate that he

cannot survive a winter alone in the Arctic wilderness. During his self-imposed exile from the world, Thomas Cave struggles both with the realities of blizzard, avalanche and marauding polar bears and with the ghostly memories of the much-loved wife and child he has lost.

### The Collector of Lost Things

Jeremy Page (2013)



In 1845, narrator Eliot Saxby joins an expedition to the Arctic in search of the truth about what has happened to the reportedly

extinct Great Auk. Intrigued by the enigmatic presence of a woman on board the ship, he is also appalled by the slaughter the men inflict on the wildlife they encounter and tries to rescue something from all the bloodshed. Page's story powerfully explores man's often violent relationship with the natural world.



# TV & RADIO



## Ancient highway

**David Baddiel on the Silk Road**

**TV** Discovery,  
scheduled for Sunday 21 February

In a four-part series, David Baddiel travels 4,000 miles from Xi'an, China, via Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Georgia, to Istanbul, Turkey. It's a journey along the world's most famous trade route, which has a history dating back more than 2,000 years, and which finds Baddiel walking in the steps of merchants, warriors and pilgrims.

Along the way, he uncovers the secrets of a technique that baffled the Romans, how to make silk; sees archaeological treasures that will be unfamiliar to many in the west; and, of course, encounters the ghost of Marco Polo.



Did San Francisco Bay swallow up three Alcatraz escapees?

## Jailbreak

**Escape the Rock**

**TV** Yesterday,  
scheduled for Tuesday 9 February

On 11 June 1962, a trio of bank robbers, Frank Morris and Clarence and John Anglin, launched a raft made of patched-up raincoats in a bid to escape from the notorious Alcatraz prison. They've never been seen since. Could they have survived the chilly waters of San Francisco Bay to find freedom? Dutch scientists Oliver Hoes, Rolf Hut and Fedor Baart reinvestigate the case.

Over on History, *Alcatraz: The Search for the Truth* (Friday 19 February) covers similar ground and features contributions from the family of the Anglin brothers.

## Indian narratives

*Sunil Khilnani tells us about his new series exploring the figures who have shaped an incredibly diverse nation*

**Incarnations: India in 50 Lives**

**Radio** Radio 4,  
scheduled for Monday 22 February

More than any other nation, says Sunil Khilnani, India is a place of contradictions. "It contains within a single nation-state more diversities than any other country, whether it's diversities of religion, or caste and craft, or language," he tells *BBC History Magazine*. "All the main lines of conflict other societies have, India has in multiple numbers."

How to grapple with these contradictions? In *Incarnations*, the solution Khilnani, director of the King's College London India Institute, adopts is to look at India's history through the lives of 50 key figures. As the weekday series returns for its second part, focusing on those who have shaped India's 20th and 21st centuries, it's a more radical approach than you might imagine.

According to Khilnani, one reason Brits aren't more aware of many of these figures is that we've tended to see the country as "a land of collective identities" rather than of individuals.

This obscures nuances. Consider a figure such as Tamil political leader VO Chidambaram Pillai (1872–1936),

who started a shipping company as a challenge to the British India Steam Navigation Company. Charged with sedition by the colonial authorities, he was jailed in 1908, yet he's been largely forgotten. "Unlike Gandhi, for whom prison was a sort of schooling ground for freedom, prison broke Pillai, and he came out defeated," says Khilnani.

Turning to Mahatma Gandhi himself, Khilnani admits that he relished the challenge of trying to find something new to say about one of the 20th-century's greatest leaders. "For me, Gandhi is a deeply original and radical thinker because he has a conception of politics where he doesn't see it as simply tied to the state," he says. "He sees politics all around us. In that sense, he's not primarily for me a religious thinker but a really profound political thinker."

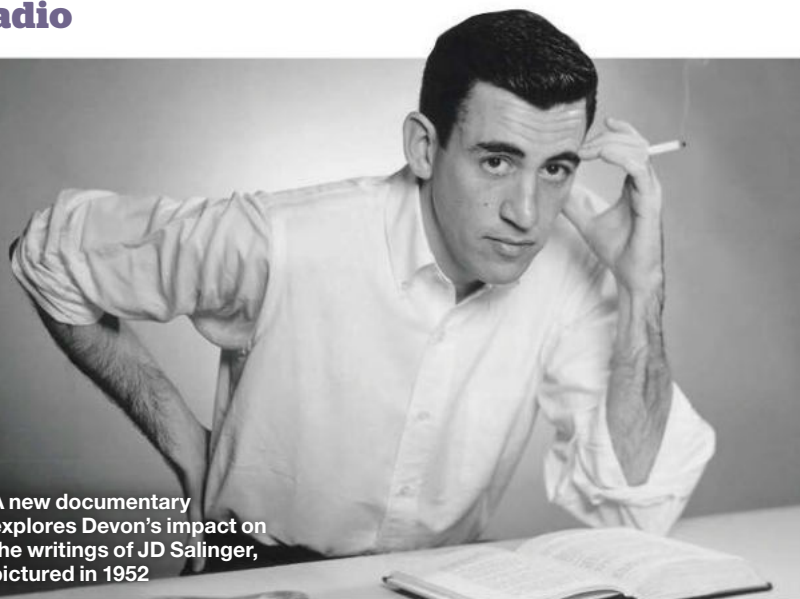
As for the kinds of figures who might feature were the show to be remade a century from now, Khilnani says we need to look to the tensions being revealed by economic development. "It's capitalists and activists who are shaping a lot of the debates in India today," he says, "and not only activists of the progressive or left side, but also those of a religious kind who one might think of as on the right." ■

**"India contains within a single nation-state more diversities than any other country"**

Sunil Khilnani pictured in Mumbai while recording a series that challenges the idea that India is solely "a land of collective identities"







A new documentary explores Devon's impact on the writings of JD Salinger, pictured in 1952

## GI Jerome

**JD Salinger, Made in England**  
**RADIO** Radio 4,  
 scheduled for Thursday 18 February

An archetype for disaffected youth, JD Salinger's Holden Caulfield is a quintessentially urban figure. Yet the protagonist of *The Catcher in the Rye* was developed partly in the largely bucolic environs of Devon. That's because Salinger, who was drafted in 1942, spent three months in Tiverton in 1944, where he prepared for the D-Day landing.

Salinger also worked on a short story, 'For Esmé – with Love and Squalor', during this period, an autobiographical tale that deals with the effects of conflict

on both soldiers and civilians. But did his time in Devon influence Salinger's writing beyond this one work?

It's a question tackled by Mark Hodgkinson (who edited Kenneth Slawenski's biography of the writer, *JD Salinger: A Life Raised High*) in a documentary that sees him head for mid-Devon. There, in the company of academic Dr Sarah Graham, Hodgkinson meets some of those who remember when the GIs came to town and sees a church that likely features in 'For Esmé'.

The documentary also includes an interview with a 96-year-old New Yorker who served with the author. "Salinger liked Devon," recalls the veteran. "Any free time he had was taken up by writing on his portable typewriter."

## Make do and mend

**Ration Books and Rabbit Pies: Films from the Home Front**  
**DVD** (BFI, £19.99)

As social historian Juliet Gardiner notes in her essay to accompany this BFI archive collection of public information films from 1940–44, the Second World War affected day-to-day life so profoundly that, until 1942, more civilians "had been killed on the home front, than troops in battle".

This meant the government "had in effect to conscript the civilian population into the war effort". One of the ways it did this was via films made by the Ministry of

Information (MOI). Much of its output consisted of instructional shorts.

Today, we often lampoon such propaganda pieces, yet they take us back to a world of austerity, where ordinary Brits had to make a little go a long way. 'Cookery Hints: Oatmeal Porridge', for example, is a paean to the joys of, well, oatmeal porridge – although how many cooked it in a fuel-efficient hay box oven as suggested is a moot point.

Other shorts deal with keeping trim (sample title that hasn't dated well: 'Fitness Wins: 4 and 20 Fit Girls'); and growing veg, with 'The Backyard Front' – which charts comedian Claude Dampier's efforts to develop his horticultural skills – a particular delight.



Mrs Mopp Entertains offers advice to housewives at war in 1943

## WANT MORE ?

We'll send you news of the best history shows every Friday. Sign up now at [historyextra.com/bbchistorymagazine/newsletter](http://historyextra.com/bbchistorymagazine/newsletter)



Michael Wood pictured with dancing ladies in Kaifeng, China

It's 50 years since the Cultural Revolution, Mao's attempt to purge capitalist and traditional elements from Chinese society. This anniversary is marked in two Radio 4 documentaries. In **Mao's Little Red Book: A Global History** (Friday 5 February), David Aaronovitch explores why a volume of quotes from speeches and writings even now carries, as shadow chancellor John McDonnell might ruefully attest, such resonance in the west. **Mao's Golden Mangoes** (Friday 12 February) charts one of the odder chapters in recent Chinese history, when exotic fruit took on a deep symbolism. On BBC Two, Michael Wood's six-part **The Story of China** (Thursday 28 January) continues through February.

On Yesterday, **Egypt's Animal Mummies** (Tuesday 16 February) examines the latest research into why and how the ancient Egyptians embalmed millions of creatures, including bulls and crocodiles.

**Doolittle's Raiders: A Final Toast** (Wednesday 10 February, PBS America) looks back at the US raid against Honshu in 1942. Seen as retaliation for Pearl Harbor, it showed Japan itself was vulnerable to air strikes. **The Road from Christ to Constantine** (Friday 19 February, PBS America) is a series that finds Professor Jonathan Phillips of Royal Holloway, University of London visiting sites important to the growth of Christianity.

Finally, the ever-excellent **Making History** (Tuesday 9 February, Radio 4) is back for a new series.



FROM THE EDITORS OF **BBC** **HiSTORY**  
MAGAZINE

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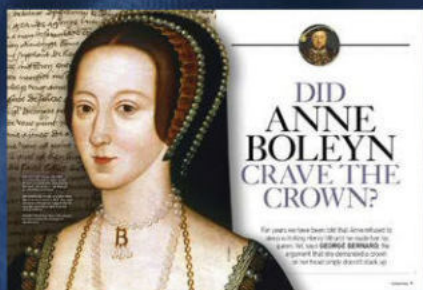
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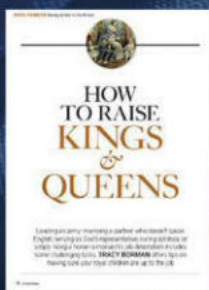
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# OUT & ABOUT

## HISTORY EXPLORER

### King Arthur's legend

Miles Russell and Spencer Mizen visit **Tintagel Castle in Cornwall** to explore its links with one of the world's great mythological figures

**K**ing Arthur. Heroic British warlord who led the fight against marauding Anglo-Saxons, or a figment of a writer's fertile imagination? It's a question that's been puzzling poets, chroniclers, historians and film-makers for more than 1,000 years.

And nowhere does this question have more resonance than on a small, wind-swept, rain-battered headland projecting into the sea off north Cornwall: Tintagel.

Numerous sites across north-west Europe – from Glastonbury Abbey in Somerset to the Forest of Paimpont in Brittany – have trumpeted their connections to King Arthur. Yet surely none are as intimately linked to the legendary warlord as Tintagel.

That this is the case is almost exclusively down to the endeavours of one man: a Welsh cleric going by the name of Geoffrey of Monmouth. In the 1130s, Geoffrey set about writing a history of the kings who had ruled the Britons over the preceding 2,000 years. The resulting *Historia Regum Britanniae* is among the greatest pieces of medieval history writing – though not an entirely reliable one. It tells us, for example, that Britain was founded by the Trojans, and introduces us to King Lear. Yet, most significant of all, says Miles Russell, senior lecturer in prehistoric and Roman archaeology at Bournemouth University, is what it tells us about Arthur.

"In his *Historia Regum Britanniae* Geoffrey gathered

together a series of legends from western Britain to come up with a single narrative of the past," says Miles. "So, in the case of Arthur, he related a tale that had been passed down by word of mouth through the generations.

"In this story, Uther Pendragon is besotted with Igraine, beautiful wife of Gorlois, Duke of Cornwall. Uther is determined to have Igraine for himself and so, with the help of the wizard Merlin, assumes the image of Gorlois and tricks his way into Gorlois' castle at Tintagel. And it is here, Geoffrey tells us, that Arthur is conceived."

It's not hard to divine why Geoffrey chose Tintagel as the site of a key, dramatic scene in his retelling of a shadowy, mythical past. The modern world can seem a long way away when you venture out onto the island fortress on a dark winter's day – the wind whipping around you and the sea raging below. Yet there's more to Tintagel's links to Dark Age Britain than atmosphere.

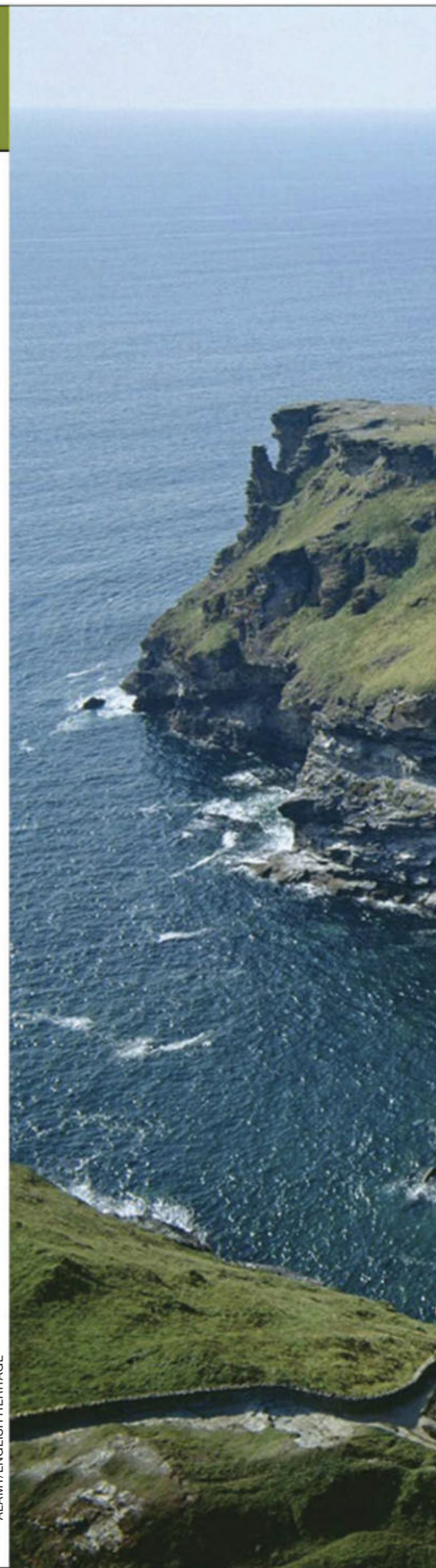
"Geoffrey's decision to choose Tintagel as the site of Arthur's conception would have been informed by history every bit as much as legend," says Miles. "We know that there was a lot of mining activity – primarily for tin – around here in the Iron Age. And, as Tintagel is such a dominant part of the local landscape, it's more than possible that there was an Iron Age fort up here – perhaps ruled by an Arthur-like warlord."

What's beyond dispute is that, by the sixth century, Tintagel was a bustling port – a key link in a thriving trade network that stretched from southern Britain down the Atlantic seaboard to the

Arthur is crowned king in an image from the 13th-century chronicle *Flores Historiarum*



ALAMY/ENGLISH HERITAGE





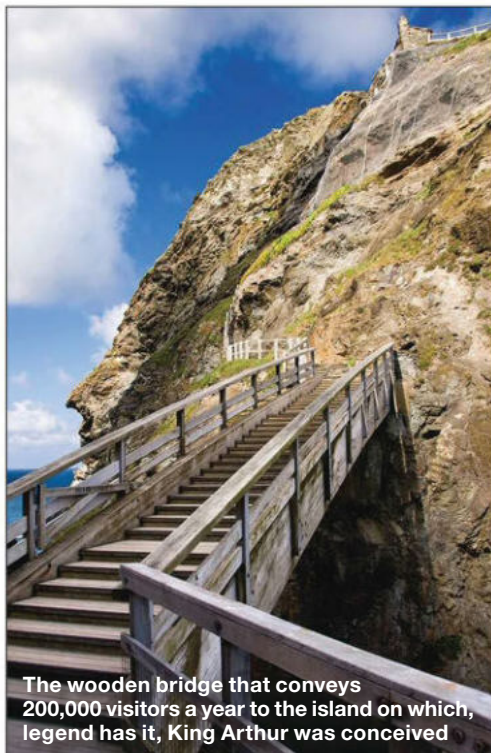
An aerial photograph of the ruins of Tintagel Castle in Cornwall, England. The castle is situated on a steep, grassy cliff overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. The ruins include stone walls, foundations, and a large rectangular enclosure. The surrounding landscape is rugged and green, with the sea visible in the background.

“It’s possible that there was  
an Iron Age fort up here  
ruled by an Arthur-like  
warlord”

MILES RUSSELL

The ruins of Earl Richard of Cornwall’s castle sit atop the island of Tintagel. Building the castle at a site with such strong associations with King Arthur was a “canny political move,” says Miles Russell





The wooden bridge that conveys 200,000 visitors a year to the island on which, legend has it, King Arthur was conceived

Mediterranean coastline.

"You would have had ships coming in here from all over southern Europe to buy tin and copper," says Miles, "and, in return, they brought with them exotic goods such as wine and olive oil." That this is the case is attested by the hundreds of pieces of fifth to seventh-century pottery that have been discovered all over the island. Faint remains of what is thought to have been the residence of a Dark Age ruler also suggest that Tintagel was a site of some importance.

Yet, following its brief heyday, Tintagel slipped back into obscurity – a draughty outpost on the edge of the kingdom. And there it probably would have stayed if it hadn't been for the arrival on the headland of Earl Richard of Cornwall – brother of King Henry III – in the early 13th century.

The great building project that Richard initiated here in the 1230s still dominates Tintagel today. At its centrepiece is his castle and, though it's now nothing more than a ruin, much of Richard's handiwork – including two courtyards, a curtain wall and a gate tower – continue to defy everything that the Cornish weather can throw at them.

But the question is, why did Richard choose to build at Tintagel? "Like many Norman aristocrats, Richard was entranced by the romance of the Arthur legend," says

Miles. "So when he decided to set up residence in northern Cornwall, what better way of establishing a bond with a heroic, Dark Age warlord – and, in doing so, effectively controlling the Cornish people – than by choosing the site where Arthur was conceived? For Richard, building a castle at Tintagel was a canny political move."

Richard's desperation to establish himself as a latter-day Arthur is even reflected in the design of the castle itself. "Its walls are thin, and it's built out of slate in a mock antiquated style," says Miles. "This tells us that Richard wasn't attempting to build a highly defensible stronghold but a romantic building that harks back to Arthur – part of what you could call a medieval theme park."

If Richard was obsessed with King Arthur, he was far from alone. Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* was hugely popular in the Middle Ages – and Arthur was its most feted hero.

"The Normans loved Arthur, and that's partly because he is said to have defeated the Anglo-Saxons, just like they'd done," says Miles. "By identifying with Arthur, the Normans were saying: 'We've got a kinship with an ancient line of British kings, so don't dare question our legitimacy.' You can see this in Henry II's decision to commission Glastonbury's monks to excavate the supposed graves of Arthur and Guinevere."

### Polite society

Yet the real genius of Geoffrey of Monmouth's text is that it transformed a blood-soaked warlord, battling through the mud of western Britain into a universal hero, celebrated in polite society across Europe. Within decades, Arthur was being championed as a Christian hero during the crusades and celebrated as an icon of knightly chivalry by French writers.

And this, says Miles, was a phenomenon with staying power. "More than 300 years after Geoffrey died, Henry VII named his eldest son Arthur to bolster his hold on the English throne. Henry VIII even used the Arthur legend – and its link to a form of

### VISIT

## Tintagel Castle



Castle Road, Tintagel, Cornwall PL34 0HE  
[english-heritage.org.uk](http://english-heritage.org.uk)

British Christianity that predates the papacy – to justify his break with Rome."

But beneath the chivalry, the romance, and the political agendas, there remain questions: Where did the idea of King Arthur come from? Could the legend be based on a historical figure?

"The trouble with this is that it takes us back to one of the most shadowy eras in British history – the chaotic, confused period that would have followed the departure of the Romans," says Miles Russell. "Sure, there could have been a king going by the name of Arthur – this was, after all, a time of warlords, of kingdom fighting kingdom, of the Anglo-Saxon invasion. Yet the reality is that, such is the dearth of evidence, we can never know."

"There is, for example, no earliest primary source that we can say contains the

ALAMY/ENGLISH HERITAGE



**"THE GENIUS OF GEOFFREY OF MONMOUTH'S TALE IS THAT IT TRANSFORMED AN OBSCURE BRITISH WARLORD INTO A EUROPEAN HERO"**





The seal of Richard, Earl of Cornwall, who turned Tintagel into a “medieval theme park” dedicated to Dark Age romances

first secure reference to Arthur. A poem called *The Gododdin*, possibly from AD 600, compares one of its lead characters to Arthur, which suggests that he may have existed as a model of heroism by the start of the seventh century.

“But the fact is, Geoffrey of Monmouth’s Arthur is a composite character. He’s created from multiple different heroes. There could be elements of Magnus Maximus – the Roman commander of Britain who led a massive rebellion against the emperor Gratian. Then there’s a British general called Ambrosius Aurelianus. He is a prominent figure in the writings of a sixth-century British monk called Gildas, who described how Aurelianus defeated the

English at a great (and seemingly historical) battle at a place called Badon.”

Could this English-slaying freedom fighter have been the primary inspiration for the mythical figure that became King Arthur? Again, we may never know. But the fact that men such as Aurelianus lived in the period following Rome’s fall – an age when Tintagel was a thriving port and probably a power base – only serves to strengthen the site’s association with Arthur.

And it is an association that has drawn visitors to Tintagel for centuries. After Earl Richard’s death, the island-fortress went into a long decline and the castle became a romantic ruin. That’s how it stayed until the 18th and 19th centuries when a series of artists such as Alfred Tennyson – fired up by a renaissance in interest in ancient Britain – began championing Tintagel’s connections to the Arthurian legend through paintings and literature. By the end of the 19th century, tourists were flocking here to witness ‘Arthur’s castle’ and ‘Merlin’s cave’.

### Celebrated creation

While most modern historians agree that it is simply impossible to establish a historical link between Tintagel and Geoffrey of Monmouth’s most celebrated creation, those tourists keep coming. Tintagel is now one of English Heritage’s top five attractions, drawing up to 3,000 visitors a day in the peak summer season.

With a new outdoor interpretation of Arthur’s legend (featuring interactive exhibits and artworks) set to be unveiled in 2016, and plans in place to build a new, 72-metre-long footbridge to link the mainland with the island in 2019, the future is looking bright for this Dark Age site.

And that, says Miles Russell, is also the case for Arthur. “He’s moved beyond his status as an obscure British king to one of the world’s great mythological figures, and so there will always be another element of his legend that can be drawn out. I don’t think his story will ever end.”



Historical advisor:

**Dr Miles Russell** (left), senior lecturer in prehistoric and Roman archaeology at Bournemouth University.  
Words: Spencer Mizen

## KING ARTHUR: FIVE MORE PLACES TO EXPLORE

### 1 Cadbury Castle SOMERSET Where an ancient fort was upgraded

This Iron Age fortress was first linked with Arthur in 1542, when the antiquary John Leland claimed that Cadbury had been ‘Camelot’. Excavations here in the late 1960s demonstrated that there was indeed significant remodification of the prehistoric fort in the post Roman period, but whether this was the headquarters of a monarch who inspired the myth of Arthur is unknown. [visitsomerset.co.uk](http://visitsomerset.co.uk)

### 2 Glastonbury Abbey SOMERSET Where ‘Arthur’ was reburied

Glastonbury today has strong popular associations with King Arthur. This is in part due to the romantic setting of both the ruined abbey and the Tor, but also because it was here, in 1191, that monks disturbed two graves, supposedly those of Arthur and Guinevere, establishing Glastonbury as ‘Avalon’. The bones were reburied by the high altar, providing a lucrative pilgrimage attraction. [glastonburyabbey.com](http://glastonburyabbey.com)

### 3 The Great Hall WINCHESTER Where a round table hangs

On the wall of the Great Hall of Winchester hangs a large round table. (The round table was added to Arthur’s story in the 12th century, and has become a potent aspect of the myth.) Dendrochronology suggests that it dates from the late 13th century and it may have been commissioned by Edward I, who was a great Arthur enthusiast. [hants.gov.uk/greathall](http://hants.gov.uk/greathall)

### 4 Caerleon GWENT Where Arthur may have won a battle

Geoffrey of Monmouth, who may have grown up nearby, frequently mentions Caerleon’s Roman legionary fortress in the *Historia Regum Britanniae*, describing it as a powerful city in Arthur’s time. Caerleon could also be the ‘City of the Legions’, one of the many victories in battle credited to Arthur. [cadw.gov.wales/daysout](http://cadw.gov.wales/daysout)

### 5 Birdoswald CUMBRIA Where it’s claimed Arthur was slain

Birdoswald was the Roman fort of Banna, an outpost at the western end of Hadrian’s Wall. Some have suggested that the fort provided the basis for the battle of Camlann, where Arthur fell in battle fighting the treacherous Mordred but, as with all things Arthurian, this is much disputed. [english-heritage.org.uk](http://english-heritage.org.uk)



Part of a new exhibition dedicated to Tintagel and the legend of King Arthur, which opened in the summer of 2015



**Urgent call for help to save the Grauer's gorilla issued by Fauna & Flora International.**  
**Your response by 7 March could make a huge difference.**

Photo: Simon J. Child/Intergalactic Gorilla Productions



Without action now the eastern lowland gorilla could be gone forever – cut the coupon or go to [www.savegorillas.org.uk](http://www.savegorillas.org.uk) to help protect the remaining gorillas.

**Consumed by conflict and caught in the grip of a severe conservation crisis, the Grauer's gorilla – the world's largest gorilla – is fighting for survival.**

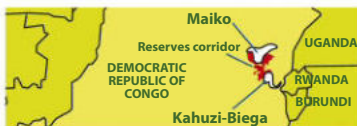
Fauna & Flora International (FFI) has put out an urgent call to the global community to save the remaining 10,000 or so Grauer's gorillas.

Funds are sought immediately to help protect new community nature reserves that are essential to the survival of the remaining gorillas between the Maiko and Kahuzi-Biega National Parks in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). It is a crucial step towards protecting these elusive and Endangered apes from complete extinction.

The Grauer's gorilla faces multiple threats to its survival – all of them due to human activity. A major expansion of agriculture and pastures in the DRC in recent years has put enormous strain on the gorilla's shrinking habitat. Industry, too, has taken its toll, with natural habitats squeezed by extensive mining for gold and coltan – a mineral used in making mobile phones. Hunting and the continuing consumption of illegal 'bush meat' have also caused many apes to be killed. What's more, continuous conflict has made it incredibly challenging to enforce wildlife protection.

As a result, numbers of Grauer's gorillas have plummeted. Just 15 years ago there were around 17,000 Grauer's gorillas in the wild. Today, scientists believe that at most 10,000 may still remain alive. Experts don't know for sure exactly how many there are, but scientists are carrying out population surveys to find out exactly how low the gorilla population has dropped. The critical conflict problems in the DRC mean the population has gone almost completely unmonitored since 1996. Now, with your help, FFI want to change that.

FFI wants to protect existing gorilla



**By working closely with local people we can help safeguard the areas needed to protect the last surviving Grauer's gorillas in the area between Maiko and Kahuzi-Biega National Parks in the eastern DRC.**

families in a vulnerable – currently unprotected – area between the Maiko and Kahuzi-Biega National Parks. These families are vital to saving the remaining Grauer's gorillas from extinction.

This gorilla protection has only become possible in recent years. Since the elections in the DRC in 2006, and the increased stability that came with them, conservation teams are starting to consolidate a series of community reserves to ensure the gorillas are fully protected.



Photo: Gill Shaw

"The Maiko and Kahuzi-Biega National Parks in the DRC are home to some of the most endangered species in Africa, including the eastern lowland gorilla. However, as human populations in the region expand so too does the risk from habitat loss. A participatory form of conservation is giving these communities a means to exist and is helping the eastern lowland gorilla and other wildlife. Time is short and I urge supporters of FFI to quickly back this vital work that is crucial to the survival of the eastern lowland gorilla."

**Sir David Attenborough OM FRS,**  
**Fauna & Flora International vice-president**

For the species to remain genetically viable, it is crucial that the gorilla families can interbreed and are not separated by deforestation and agriculture expansion in an unprotected area. FFI knows community managed land is a sustainable way to achieve this.

To do all this FFI needs to raise £130,489.56 to protect 10,847.67 km<sup>2</sup> of forest, where the gorillas are at risk. The £130,489.56 must be raised as soon as possible so that the team at FFI have time to plan ahead. Meanwhile unprotected gorillas are dying from the threats they face every day.

The Grauer's gorilla is on the very edge of survival. Together we can save it. Please send your gift by 7 March – at the very latest.

# One of the world's rarest apes faces extinction

## Population plummets from 17,000 to less than 10,000

Fauna & Flora International (FFI) have launched an emergency appeal to raise £130,489.56 from readers that will enable them to push ahead with the protection of new Community Reserves in the Democratic Republic of Congo. This is crucial to the battle to save the Endangered Grauer's gorilla from extinction. You can contribute by cutting the coupon below, visiting [www.savegorillas.org.uk](http://www.savegorillas.org.uk) or calling 01223 749019.

### How you can help save the Grauer's gorilla

£130,489.56 is sought from readers to urgently protect a series of community nature reserves that will safeguard the gorillas in unprotected areas – where they are at risk of losing their habitat and being killed by hunters. These are a few of the items urgently needed:

- £40.10 could pay for rations for a gorilla survey team
- £129.36 could pay for fuel to run the team's off-road vehicle for a month
- £258.72 could pay for a GPS unit and batteries, to help the teams locate gorilla families in the dense rainforest
- £679.15 could pay for a satellite phone, to help the teams report and respond to emergencies
- £19,180 is also needed to fund the entire DRC conservation team for 6 months.

**Any donations, large or small, will be received with thanks and go a long way to helping us to save the Grauer's Gorilla.**

**Cut the coupon below and return it with your gift to FFI, to help save the remaining 10,000 Endangered Grauer's gorillas. Alternatively, go to [www.savegorillas.org.uk](http://www.savegorillas.org.uk) or call 01223 749019 Thank you.**

**I want to help save the remaining 10,000**

**Grauer's gorillas with a donation of £** \_\_\_\_\_



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Please note: If Fauna & Flora International succeeds in raising more than £130,489.56 from this appeal, funds will be used wherever they are most needed.



PR EG16BH



# FIVE THINGS TO DO IN FEBRUARY

## Renaissance mastermind

### EXHIBITION

#### Leonardo da Vinci: The Mechanics of Genius

Science Museum, London  
10 February–4 September

☎ 020 7942 4000

● [sciencemuseum.org.uk/leonardo](http://sciencemuseum.org.uk/leonardo)



A man often remembered as one of history's greatest painters, Leonardo da Vinci's talents as an inventor and draughtsman are often overlooked in favour of masterpieces such as *The Last Supper* and the *Mona Lisa*.

This month, however, London's Science Museum is launching an exhibition that focuses on the mechanical drawings that demonstrated da Vinci's radical approach to the challenges of flight, manufacturing and war. It was during a period of employment in a workshop on the site of Florence Cathedral that da Vinci is thought to have seriously started making drawings of cranes and machinery, often as a way of trying to improve on the efficiency of existing designs and processes.

The interactive exhibition, which is divided into five themes, takes a selection of machines drawn by da Vinci and reinterprets them in 3D form. The 39 models on show, which include flying machines, diving apparatus and weapons, were made in Milan in 1952 to celebrate the 500th anniversary of da Vinci's birth.

The exhibition also features large-scale reproductions of da Vinci's famous drawings and sketches, as well as interactive games and multimedia installations.



A view of the exhibition, featuring 3D models of some of da Vinci's many inventions, including his parachute (top right)

**GALLERY**  
historyextra.  
com/bbchistory  
magazine  
/da-vinci

### EXHIBITION

#### Shakespeare in the Royal Library

Windsor Castle, Windsor  
13 February–1 January 2017

☎ 020 7766 7304

● [royalcollection.org.uk](http://royalcollection.org.uk)

April sees the 400th anniversary of the death of William Shakespeare. To mark the event, Windsor Castle will be displaying material from the Royal Library, including works by the playwright collected by members of the royal family.



A 1910 edition of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*

**GALLERY**  
historyextra.  
com/bbchistory  
magazine  
/shakespeare-  
windsor

### EXHIBITION

#### Pre-Raphaelites: Beauty and Rebellion

Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool  
12 February–5 June

☎ 0151 478 4199

● [liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/walker](http://liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/walker)

More than 120 paintings by leading Pre-Raphaelite artists, such as Ford Madox Brown and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, are to go on show in Liverpool, in an exhibition highlighting the city's important role in this 19th-century art movement.

### EVENTS

#### BBC History Magazine Roman Britain and First World War in 1916 days

M Shed, Bristol

27 and 28 February

☎ 0871 620 4021 (booking line)

● [historyextra.com/bbchistorymagazine/events](http://historyextra.com/bbchistorymagazine/events)

A host of expert speakers will gather in Bristol for a weekend of lectures this month. Peter Hart and Andrew Roberts are among those speaking on the First World War in 1916 – a year that saw the battles of the Somme and Jutland – while Barry Cunliffe, Bronwen Riley and others will discuss life in Roman Britain.

### EXHIBITION / FREE ENTRY

#### Things Fall Apart

Calvert 22 Foundation,  
London

4 February–3 April

☎ 020 7613 2141

● [calvert22.org](http://calvert22.org)

Part of Calvert 22's Red Africa season, which examines the legacy of cultural relationships between Africa, the Soviet Union and related countries during the Cold War, this exhibition draws together film, photography, propaganda, and public art to explore this theme.

**GALLERY**  
historyextra.  
com/bbchistory  
magazine  
/red-africa



## MY FAVOURITE PLACE

# Xanadu, China



by **John Man**

For the latest in our historical holidays series, John explores a lost Mongolian palace, still untouched by tourism

Most people, surely, have heard the name Xanadu: the 1980 film starring Olivia Newton John; the acclaimed Broadway musical (also in London last year); a night club; a hotel; the mansion in *Citizen Kane*; or perhaps a school memory of Coleridge's 1797 poem *Kubla Khan*:

*In Xanadu did Kubla Khan  
A stately pleasure dome-decree:  
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran  
Through caverns measureless  
to man  
Down to a sunless sea.*

It all sounds very surreal, very magical. And that's precisely why Xanadu appeals: magic, the magic being that Xanadu is a real place. I fell in love with the idea of it, then with the place itself, when researching Genghis Khan and his grandson Kublai.

It all started with Genghis, as so much does in central Asia. In his youth (late 12th century), Genghis was a down-and-out from nowhere: father dead, mother abandoned. A leader of genius, he built a tribal federation, a nation, and, by the time he died in 1227, the greatest land empire in history.

The empire was divided among Genghis's descendants and his grandson Kublai emerged as supreme. Under him the empire doubled again. At its peak in 1294, it incorporated a sixth of all humanity, including all of China. Kublai's first capital was Xanadu, named when he made Beijing his main base. Beijing was Dadu, 'Great Capital', while Xanadu was Shangdu, 'Upper Capital'. We call it Xanadu thanks to Marco Polo, his English populariser, Hakluyt, and Coleridge, who was reading Hakluyt when he fell into a drug-induced sleep and dreamed of Kublai.

Xanadu was destroyed by rebels when the Mongols were thrown out of China in 1368. No visitors arrived here for almost 600 years until the 1930s when the Japanese took an interest



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE:

The remains of a palace wall, the mound in the background is the base of Kublai's main palace; the Shandian river (the remains are on the north bank); Xanadu's impressive entrance with Kublai on horseback; Yurts at sunrise, near Xanadu

after they had seized Manchuria – Xanadu was right on the border. Then came communist rule and another period of limbo. British writers Caroline Alexander and William Dalrymple visited briefly, but only in the 1990s did the site open up, along with China itself.

When I first arrived in the summer of 1996, there was rolling grass, wildflowers, low walls and distant hills. Not even a fence. I wandered alone over the earth base of the palace where Marco Polo met Kublai Khan in 1275 – a ridge of rammed earth about 50 metres long, standing 6 metres above the grass. I picked up bits of stone and pottery as if they were sacred

relics. I'm still wondering what to do with them.

At the time, Xanadu was on the verge of change. Half a dozen men were measuring off squares with posts and string – archaeologists starting an excavation. My next visit in 2004 revealed a tourist camp and small museum.

Outside, a glass cabinet contained an immense pillar of white marble, 2 metres high. I tried the door and to my astonishment, it opened. Feeling as privileged as a prince and as guilty as a schoolboy, I ran my fingers over marble that might have been touched by Kublai and Marco – brilliantly carved bas-reliefs of intertwining dragons and peonies, symbols of both war and peace. It was evidence of the skill of Kublai's artists, and the labour involved, for the closest source of marble was 400km away.

**An image of Kublai Khan from 1294. Kublai built Xanadu as his summer palace**

BRIDGEMAN IMAGES



“I wandered alone  
over the earth base of  
the palace where Marco  
Polo met Kublai Khan

## ADVICE FOR TRAVELLERS

### BEST TIME TO GO

Summer (May–September) is the best time to visit but remember, this is the Mongolian Plateau. Be prepared for heat, cold, rain, wind, and even snow if you go in May or September.

### GETTING THERE

The closest international airport to Xanadu is Beijing Capital International Airport, about 153 miles away. The site itself is a six-hour journey from Beijing by road, via Zhangjiakou.

There was once an overnight bus service to Xanadu but now visitors need to hire a car or share a minibus. There is currently nowhere to stay on site, but there are a couple of good hotels in fast-developing Duolun, 15 miles away.

### WHAT TO TAKE

Sturdy walking gear and a good camera.

### WHAT TO BRING BACK

Cashmere and leather goods.

### FURTHER INFO

Tourists to Xanadu are currently few, but they are growing in numbers. At present, no non-Chinese agencies run regular tours, but tailor-made trips can be arranged through various travel providers.

By 2008, the tourist camp and marble pillar had gone, but there was a grand 4 metre portico, with two copies of the marble pillar for supports, a fence and a ticket booth. Alongside was a large bas-relief of armies and courtiers crowding in on an enthroned Kublai holding an impressive pose. By 2012, Xanadu had become a Unesco World Heritage Site.

By now the enigmatic ridges had begun to make sense. You can see the town's structure on Google Earth (42°21'37"N / 116°11'06"E, with lots of pictures): three sections, all squares, nested inside each

other. In the northern section was a grassy park where (in Marco's words) deer, hares and rabbits wandered until they were shot by Kublai and his courtiers. In the south-east corner was the imperial city, with mud brick houses for workmen, craftsmen and officials, and several temples. Inside this, the palace city of royal residences, meeting halls and the palace itself, the Pavilion of Great Peace. Xanadu was once home to about 120,000 people.

Coleridge knew nothing of Xanadu's landscape, of course. There are no rivers (though there is a meandering stream, the Shandian), no caverns, chasms, caves of ice, incense-bearing trees or sunless sea. Coleridge's Xanadu owes more to Somerset than China.

But there is something in the schoolroom poem. I became

intrigued by the “stately pleasure dome”, because Marco described what he called the “cane palace” in detail. A CGI of it suggests a bamboo structure that was Chinese in materials but Mongolian in shape. I believe it to be a symbol of Kublai's two great cultures. If so, it was an astonishing and original creation, an essential part of the magic that is still part of the Xanadu we know today. **11**

**John Man** is a historian and travel writer. He will be leading a tour to Xanadu with Steppes Travel in September 2016

Read more about John's experiences in Xanadu at [historyextra.com/bbchistorymagazine/xanadu](http://historyextra.com/bbchistorymagazine/xanadu)

**Next month:** Sue Law visits Penang in Malaysia



### Been there...

Have you been to **Xanadu**? Do you have a top tip for readers? Contact us via Twitter or Facebook

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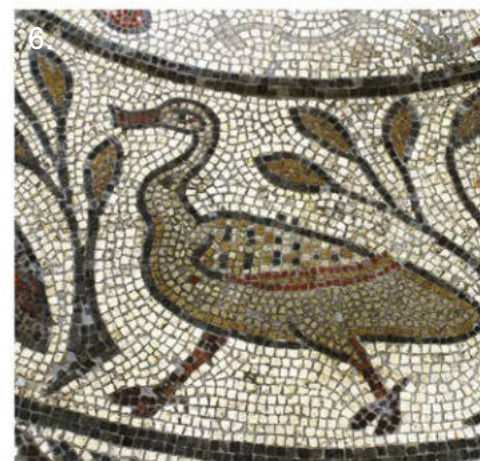
3.



4.



5.



6.

## 1. Rosslyn Chapel, Near Edinburgh

Rosslyn Chapel was founded in 1446. The beauty of its setting and the mysterious symbolism of its ornate stonework have inspired, attracted and intrigued visitors for generations. A new visitor centre tells the chapel's story – from its 15th century origins to the Da Vinci Code and beyond. Guides provide free talks throughout the day.

0131 440 2159 // [www.rosslynchapel.com](http://www.rosslynchapel.com)

## 2. Bamburgh Castle

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01668 214208

[www.bamburghcastle.com](http://www.bamburghcastle.com)

## 3. Anaesthesia Heritage Museum

A unique medical science museum devoted to the history of anaesthesia, resuscitation and pain relief, located in the heart of London. The museum's rare book collection and archive are a unique resource for curious visitors and specialist researchers. A new exhibition, the riddle of shock, explores how treatment and understanding of shock developed during the First World War.

020 7631 8865 // [www.aagbi.org/heritage](http://www.aagbi.org/heritage)

## 4. Anvils & Petticoats: Women in Industry, Sat 13 – Sun 21 Feb

Find out about the incredible history of women workers at Black Country Living Museum in a one off half term event that explores how women in industry changed the course of history. Meet a munitionette and lady chainmaker, step inside the fight for a fair wage and get hands on with crafts and trails.

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# MISCELLANY

Q&A



## QUIZ

BY JULIAN HUMPHRYS

Try your hand at this month's history quiz

**ONLINE QUIZZES**  
historyextra.com  
/bbchistory-magazine/quiz

**1.** Which title was first officially used by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman (pictured left)?

**2.** What links Robert Barlow, William Cavendish, William St Loe and George Talbot?

**3.** Which English artist was killed in July 1944 while serving with the Welsh Guards in Normandy?

**4.** How did Halifax-born Percy Shaw make a major contribution to road safety in 1934?

**5.** Which Venetian-born 15th-century writer's last known work was a poem eulogising Joan of Arc?

**6.** This statue of a Lincolnshire poet is among the last works of one of Victorian England's best-known artists. Who was the poet and who was the artist?



ILLUSTRATION BY GLEN MCBETH

## Q If medieval kings drank only wine because water was unsafe, were they continuously inebriated?

PE Francois, West Midlands

**A** Many rulers' prodigious alcohol intake meant they could drink you or I under the table and walk home to the palace in a straight line.

People consumed massive amounts of alcoholic beverages in the Middle Ages, though in England this was for the most part weak ale (known as small beer). This was not because they didn't trust the water – the water supplies in most places were generally perfectly safe. It's just that beer, an important source of nutrition, was preferred.

The upper classes drank wine, and many monarchs did indeed booze mightily, obvious examples being Edward IV, Henry VIII and, later, George IV. William the Conqueror could also knock it back; by one account he tried a "wine and spirit-only diet" in later life to try to lose weight. It wasn't too successful: when he died his

body was too big for his tomb, and when it was forced in, it burst, reputedly leaving an awful smell.

There are few, if any, medieval kings of England or Scotland who could categorically be described as alcoholics or chronic drunkards in the manner of say, the Mughal emperor Jahangir (r1605–27), the mad King Eric XIV of Sweden (r1560–68) or the Ottoman sultan Selim II (r1566–74), who was widely known, rather tellingly, as Selim the Drunk.

One possible contender is the son of King Cnut, Harthacnut, ruler of England from 1040–42. Allegedly a notorious dipsomaniac, Harthacnut supposedly had a stroke in 1042 while toasting the health of the bride at a wedding feast in Lambeth.

Eugene Byrne, author and journalist



### QUIZ ANSWERS

**1.** Prime minister **2.** They were all – at some point – married to Bess of Hardwick **3.** Rex Whistler **4.** He invented cat's eyes **5.** Christine de Pisan **6.** Alfred, Lord Tennyson and George Frederick Watts



## SAMANTHA'S RECIPE CORNER



Every issue, picture editor **Samantha Nott** brings you a recipe from the past. This month it's a fragrant dessert enjoyed at Tudor banquets

### A dysschefull of snowe

Ending a banquet with a sweet course, which was often flavoured with exotic spices and syrups, became popular in the 16th century among the social elite. This month I've chosen the Tudor favourite 'A dysschefull of snowe' (also known as strawberries on snow, although other fruits were often used), a dessert that could be an unusual yet delicious treat to complete your Valentine's Day menu.

#### INGREDIENTS

##### Strawberries:

- 1 pint strawberries, halved
- ½ cup red wine
- ¼ cup caster sugar
- ¼ tsp cinnamon
- ¼ tsp ginger

##### Cream:

- ½ pint whipping cream
- ¼ cup caster sugar
- 1 tbsp rose water
- 1 egg white
- A few amaretti biscuits

#### METHOD

**Strawberries:** Mix together the red wine, sugar,

cinnamon and ginger. Add strawberries and marinate in the fridge for 1–2 hours.

**Cream:** In a bowl whip the cream until fluffy. In a separate bowl whisk the egg white till it forms soft peaks.

Fold the whipped cream into the egg white. Add the sugar and rose water and stir gently.

#### TO SERVE

Once marinated, put the strawberry mixture into a serving bowl or tall glass. Spoon the cream on top. Crumble some amaretti biscuits to finish.

#### TEAM VERDICT

"Light and fragrant"

"Perfect for Valentine's Day"

**Difficulty:** 2/10

**Time:** 15 minutes  
**preparation, 2 hours  
marinating**

*Recipe taken from A Proper Neue Book of Cokery (c1575), found in Terry Breverton's The Tudor Kitchen (Amberley, 2015)*

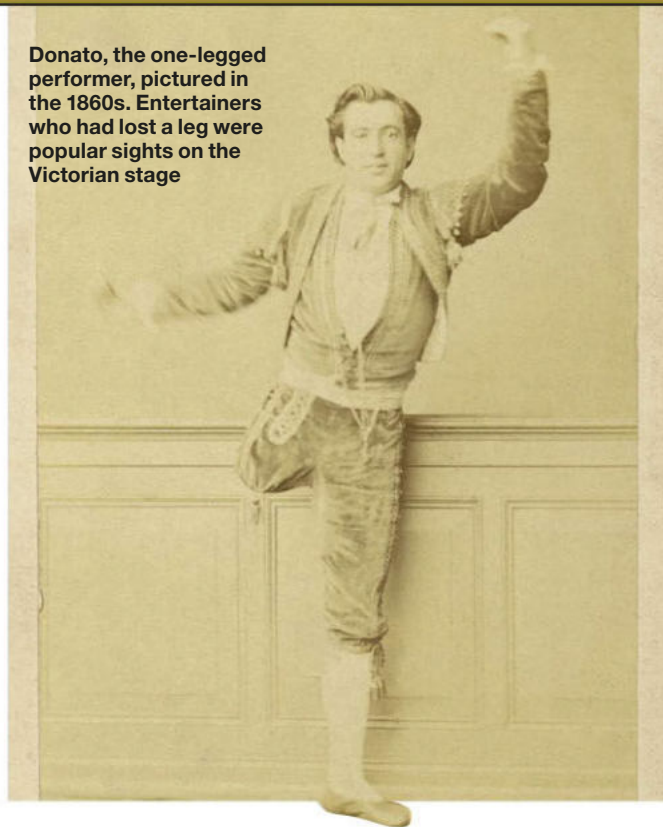


Will a dysschefull of snowe be gracing your Valentine's table this month?

## GOT A QUESTION?

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**Donato, the one-legged performer, pictured in the 1860s. Entertainers who had lost a leg were popular sights on the Victorian stage**



## Q What was the Victorian act known as Leg Mania Artiste?

**Darci Blask**, by email

**A** Leg Mania was a popular term in the 19th and early 20th century, used to describe a music hall act that performed "a somewhat violent dance, consisting of high kicking and contortions of the legs".

The act was highly popular in music halls, and could be performed solo, as a duo or a troupe. Both men and women could bill themselves as Leg Mania Artistes and in the early 1860s there was a specific craze for one-legged dancers for pantomimes in the west end. The acts were often performed by ex-soldiers or beggars who had lost a leg either in combat or an industrial accident.

Performers were brought on stage during the pantomime performance at Christmas

time, and were often greeted with cheers as the audience recognised them. The most famous was Donato, "the original one legged phenomenon" who could be seen in Covent Garden.

By 1908, the Leg Mania craze was still attracting the interest of audiences, and a sister duo Florence and Edith Atkinson, performing as The Primroses, caught national attention when the theatre curtain collapsed during their act, injuring Edith while she performed a particularly high kick.

**Fern Riddell**, cultural historian and a regular on BBC Radio 3's *Free Thinking*. Turn to page 16 to read more from Fern



# PRIZE CROSSWORD

A ceramic pot created by which ancient empire? (see 24 across)



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### Across

**7** eg a lorica worn by a Roman soldier (6)

**9** A 35-mile stretch of earthworks in the West Country, thought to date from post-Roman times (8)

**11** Wade-Giles spelling of the major member of the Chinese government from 1949 to his death in 1976 (4,2,3)

**12** The self-proclaimed Prince of Wales, \_\_ Glyndŵr, who died in the early 15th century (5)

**13** First name of the British nurse notoriously executed by the Germans for treason during the First World War (5)

**14** King of Hungary, later king of Bohemia, who became Holy Roman Emperor until his death in 1437 (9)

**16** Ancient capital of Macedonia, birthplace of Alexander the Great (5)

**17** Name of controversial head of a US government agency, and of a US president (6)

**20** One of the independent areas set up in the north of South Africa as a result of the Great Trek of the 1830s to 1840s (9)

**22** That of Milan (AD 313) was used by emperor Constantine to mandate toleration of Christianity, by then his favoured religion (5)

**24** The ancient empire ended by the taking of its capital Tenochtitlán in the 16th century (5)

**26** South African founder of the Black Consciousness Movement, killed while in custody in 1977 (5,4)

**27** The name of four pharaohs of the 18th dynasty of ancient Egypt, the first of whom succeeded Amenhotep I (8)

**28** This African country underwent eight years of misrule and bloodshed until the overthrow of its dictator in 1979 (6)

### Down

**1** Surname of notorious 20th-century Venezuelan terrorist, nicknamed 'Carlos the Jackal' (7)

**2** The warhorse of Alexander the Great, which achieved legendary status (10)

**3** Film studio in west London celebrated for its classic comedies (6)

**4** Capital city which, from 1624–1925, went under the name of Christiania and later Kristiania (4)

**5** Major Greek city of Sicily, ruled by the

tyrant Dionysius I (c430–367 BC) (8)

**6** Sometimes referred to as the royal family of the US, this political dynasty descended from Irish immigrants (7)

**8** 13th/14th-century Polynesian settlers of a Pacific island country who had developed a rich culture by the time of the first contact by Abel Tasman in 1642 (5)

**10** At the battle of which, in 52 BC, Julius Caesar defeated the Gauls – a turning point in the Gallic Wars (6)

**15** This UK archaeological site had six periods of construction between 3000 BC and 1520 BC (10)

**16** Aulus, the general appointed by Emperor Claudius to lead the invasion of Britain in AD 43, becoming its first Roman governor (8)

**17** England's second Astronomer Royal, best known for computing the orbit of the heavenly body later named after him (6)

**18** The first non-European secretary-general of the UN, he went on to serve two terms in that role, declining to serve a third (1,5)

**19** Empire lasting for more than 600 years, peaking in 16th century and ending in 1922 (7)

**21** Umbrian town, birthplace of one of Italy's patron saints (the other being St Catherine) (6)

**23** One of the (Greek) names for ancient Troy (5)

**25** British \_\_, an Iron Age hill fort on one of the peaks of the Malvern Hills (4)

Compiled by **Eddie James**

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Editor Rob Attar [robertattar@historyextra.com](mailto:robertattar@historyextra.com)

Deputy editor Charlotte Hodgman [charlottehodgman@historyextra.com](mailto:charlottehodgman@historyextra.com)

Reviews editor Matt Elton [mattelton@historyextra.com](mailto:mattelton@historyextra.com)

Production editor Spencer Mizen

Picture editor Samantha Nott [samnott@historyextra.com](mailto:samnott@historyextra.com)

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Deputy art editors Rachel Dickens, Rosemary Smith

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[Sam.Jones@immediate.co.uk](mailto:Sam.Jones@immediate.co.uk)

**Brand sales executive**

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Scarlett Baverstock 0117 314 7447  
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**Group direct marketing manager**

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**Subscriptions director** Jacky Perales-Morris

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[buckley@buckleypell.com](mailto:buckley@buckleypell.com)

**PRESS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS**

**Press officer** Dominic Lobley

020 7150 5015  
[dominic.lobley@immediate.co.uk](mailto:dominic.lobley@immediate.co.uk)

**SYNDICATION**

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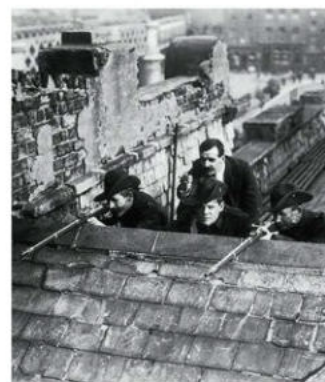
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"In Berlin, Reagan called upon President Gorbachev to 'Tear down this wall!' It's easy to forget how awful the Cold War was, and the way it condemned millions of Europeans to servitude"

Broadcaster Justin Webb chooses

# Ronald Reagan

1911-2004

Ronald Reagan, politician and actor, was the 40th president of the US (1981–89). He also served two terms as a Republican governor of California (1967–75). A radio sports announcer-turned-actor, he starred in films such as *Bedtime for Bonzo*. He won the Republican presidential nomination at the third attempt, and beat Jimmy Carter to become president in 1980. The economic policies he pursued – after surviving an assassination attempt in 1981 – were dubbed 'Reaganomics'. He oversaw an arms build-up, credited by some with helping the west win the Cold War. He married twice, to actresses Jane Wyman and Nancy Davis.

### When did you first hear about Ronald Reagan?

In 1980, the year I started university. I was aware of the feeling on the British 'left', and at the London School of Economics where I was studying, that this man was a nightmare, threat and warmonger. My first thoughts were negative. I'd gone to a bit of a hippyish school and when I heard that the first thing he did on being elected was get a haircut, I thought: "What an odious character!"

### What kind of person was Reagan?

We think of him as a bit of a showman, and he was amiable and had a mastery of the one-liner and the 'Aw, shucks' manner. But he was also brave, as we saw when he was shot. On seeing Nancy as he was about to go into the operating theatre, he famously quipped: "Sorry, I forgot to duck!" He was a lot more liberal than modern Republicans on immigration. He had an amnesty for illegal immigrants and spoke warmly about people coming to make America their home. He would have taken in many Syrians, I reckon, in sharp contrast to the rhetoric of the modern party.

### What made Reagan a hero?

The fact that he was a transformational president, who made a real difference to the history of the world. I salute him because he was so effective a leader at a crucial moment in his presidency. He came to power when the west was in trouble, a few years after Watergate, and there was a sense of drift and decay. He helped turn America around, and just as importantly, turn the country's mood around as well, with his sunny, can-do optimism, and belief.



Reagan may be seen by some Britons as a clown, but, says Justin Webb, "that is to seriously underestimate him"

### What was Reagan's finest hour?

Finding a way of standing up to the USSR while recognising the humanity and rationality of his opponents – despite saying some frightening things about the Soviet Union when he came to power. To pinpoint a moment, it was the speech he made at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin when he called upon President Gorbachev to "Tear down this wall!" It's easy to forget how awful the Cold War was, and the way it condemned millions of Europeans to servitude. We sometimes look back upon that era almost nostalgically because so many frightening things have happened since. But in truth, to win the Cold War was the most staggering achievement.

### Is there anything you don't particularly admire about him?

He undoubtedly got some things very wrong and I think history will look back upon the Iran-Contra affair and judge him very harshly. There is little doubt that he lied to the American people over the matter in an almost Nixonian fashion.

### Do you think his portrayal on TV's *Spitting Image* has damaged his reputation in Britain, perhaps irrevocably?

Possibly. He's been completely rehabilitated in America but here he's still regarded by a lot of reasonable people as a bad president and a warmonger. Many on this side of the pond always regarded him as a bit of a clown, but that is to seriously underestimate him.

### Can you see any parallels between his life and your own?

Perhaps in one respect only: he saw himself as a Californian and a westerner, and I too have a real love for America's western states and western way of life – although unlike him, I'm not really into dressing up as a cowboy!

### If you could meet Reagan, what would you ask him?

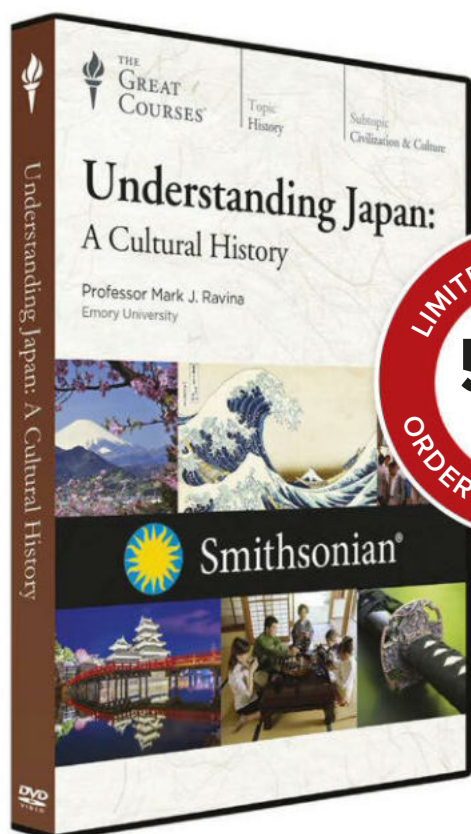
I'd ask him how Britain should foster the kind of patriotism, sense of cohesion and national unity in its people that he so valued in America. **H**

*Justin Webb was talking to York Membery*

Justin Webb is a presenter on the Radio 4 *Today* show. He spent eight years as a BBC correspondent in the US







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The destinations have been selected and described by Tom Hall, editorial director at Lonely Planet. Many of them, such as the Somme, Venice’s Jewish ghetto and Cnut’s Denmark, are marking major anniversaries, while others are simply fascinating places to visit at these times of the year.

I hope you find this supplement inspiring and that you enjoy exploring the past in 2016.

**Rob Attar**  
*Editor*

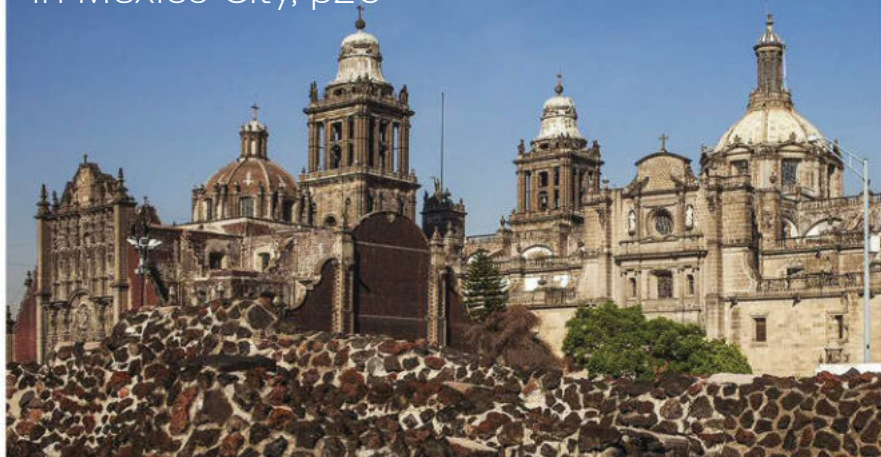
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## Head back in time to **Viking Denmark**

**W**hile far from obscure, Cnut, 11th-century king of England and much of Scandinavia, is certainly not as renowned as many other monarchs with a less formidable pedigree. He is best known for demonstrating his inability to hold back the tide in a display of wise humility – a possibly apocryphal story, but one that hints at wisdom and modesty. In the 1,000th anniversary of his accession to the throne of England, getting on the trail of this king and the civilisation that surrounded him is

most likely breaking new ground for a history-minded traveller.

Cnut spent much of the later years of his reign in England, and was interred at the famous Winchester Cathedral. However it is in his other kingdom that you'll get the most vivid taste of Viking history. Denmark keeps its Viking links alive in places like Jelling, a Unesco-rated collection of runestones, barrows and other remnants of the era. Roskilde is home to a wonderful Viking ship as well as being the location of Cnut's revenge against Danish

usurper, Ulf. While here, don't miss the city's cathedral, which is the traditional resting place of Denmark's kings and queens.

The most vivid re-creation of Viking life is found in Ribe in southern Denmark, where the Viking Centre gives the sense of a medieval settlement. Ribe is one of Europe's loveliest old towns, and the perfect place to explore a little deeper: once you're done meeting Vikings face-to-face, there's a superb repository of Viking and later booty at Museet Ribes Vikinger.

### TRAVEL TIPS

- The very helpful Visit Denmark ([visitdenmark.co.uk](http://visitdenmark.co.uk)) is a one-stop shop for planning a Viking-inspired itinerary.
- Nordic Visitor ([denmark.nordicvisitor.com](http://denmark.nordicvisitor.com)) is also a useful booking resource.

### IF YOU LIKE THIS...

- Oslo's Viking Ship Museum is one of a cluster of outstanding museums in the Norwegian capital, including a superb attraction dedicated to adventurer Thor Heyerdahl.



ROBERT HARDING

Longboats on display at the excellent Vikingeskibs museum in Roskilde, Denmark

🔥 In the 1,000th anniversary of Cnut's ascension to the throne of England, get on the Viking trail...



**MARCH**

## Lose yourself in Venice

March 2016 is the 500th anniversary of Venice's Jewish ghetto and an ideal time to visit

### TRAVEL TIPS

● A walking tour can help to unlock the hidden secrets of Venice, and Venicescapes ([venicescapes.org](http://venicescapes.org)) is a well-regarded specialist.

● Kirker Holidays ([kirkerholidays.co.uk](http://kirkerholidays.co.uk)) is an experienced tailor-made and culturally-themed tour operator.

### IF YOU LIKE THIS...

● There's nowhere quite like Venice, but the nearby cities of Ferrara and Ravenna are understated historical gems, the latter blessed with spectacular Byzantine mosaics.

There is always a good reason to go back to Venice or, if you are lucky enough to not yet have visited, see this beautiful city for the first time. There are few places that offer such an arresting first impression, and that on closer inspection have so many more fascinating stories to tell.

In 2016, Venice's ghetto, the area of the city where Jewish residents were compelled to live, marks its 500th anniversary, and it remains as vital and fascinating an area of the city as ever. Venice's Jewish history goes back much further towards the murky, marshy origins of the Most Serene Republic, but it was in 1516 that the city's Jews were confined to Ghetto Nuova, a small island in a distant corner of Cannaregio. Further immigration into

this safe, if confined, haven led to the expansion of houses overlooking the Campo del Ghetto, giving them the multi-storey appearance they retain today in contrast to the rest of Venice.

Most of all, the area remains the heart of the city's Jewish heritage, and is currently undergoing major refurbishment in time for the anniversary at the end of March. There are five historic synagogues that can be visited on an hour-long walking tour from the excellent Museo Ebraico.

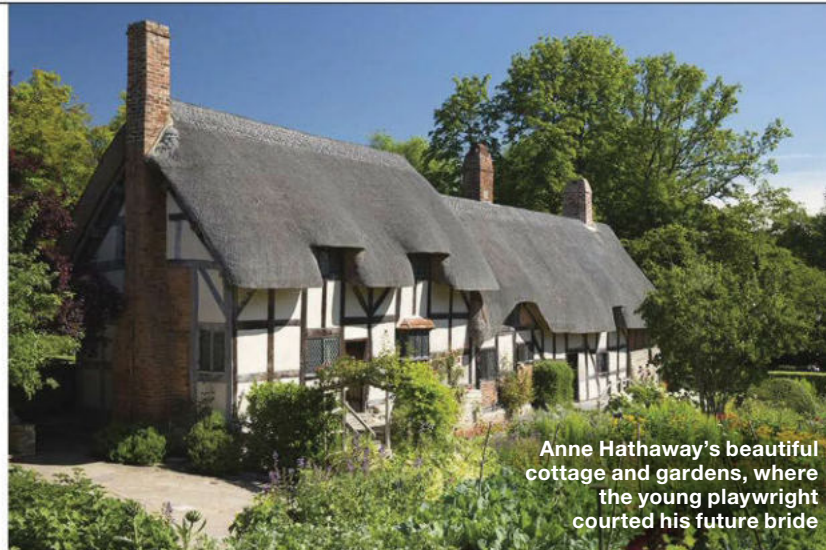
March is an excellent time to be in Venice. Summer crowds are a long way off, but you may wish to avoid the Easter weekend (25–27 March), as this is a very busy time to visit. Come just before or after to see the city at its best.

**APRIL**

## Take a literary journey to Shakespeare's Stratford

Stratford remains at the heart of Shakespeare's story for visitors to England. Though an essential destination on most international visitor itineraries, many Britons have not yet made the pilgrimage here. This is a great year to put that right, or make a return visit, in time for the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death in April.

New Place, where the playwright lived in later years – and died – is set to reopen in 2016 after a two-year renovation. This, and other historic houses such as Anne Hathaway's Cottage, are looked after by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, who offer a combined entrance ticket (to include New Place, when open). Shakespeare's grave, in Holy Trinity church is another essential stop. Many visitors tour the houses 'in order', starting with Shakespeare's birthplace, so if you're looking to leave the crowds behind, consider a counter-intuitive



Anne Hathaway's beautiful cottage and gardens, where the young playwright courted his future bride

approach. After hours, the Old Thatch Tavern (dating from 1470) is a great place for a pint under low ceilings in winter and in a lovely courtyard in the summer.

Away from Stratford there is much to enjoy nearby. Warwick's castle is the stand-out highlight of a town full of interesting

medieval buildings and is one of the Midlands' most popular visitor attractions. Kenilworth Castle is an atmospheric ruin with a fabulous Elizabethan-era garden. Staying on the Elizabethan trail, Charlecote Park is a beautiful National Trust property set in extensive grounds.

### TRAVEL TIPS

● The official site for planning a trip to the town is [visitstratforduponavon.co.uk](http://visitstratforduponavon.co.uk). The Shakespeare Country site ([shakespeare-country.co.uk](http://shakespeare-country.co.uk)) is another detailed guide to Stratford and surroundings.

### IF YOU LIKE THIS...

● Haworth, West Yorkshire is the famous home of the Brontë sisters, with wild moorland walks and steam train rides to accompany literary associations.

● Take your pick of Italian towns associated with Shakespeare: Verona, Venice or Padua. All three are wonderful places to dig-in to the history surrounding his many works set in Italy.



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# Discover the story of the Spanish Civil War

This year marks 80 years since the start of the Spanish Civil War, a bitter conflict which rocked the Iberian peninsula for three years. Tourism highlighting this conflict is still in its infancy, especially compared to the focus on sites relating to the two world wars elsewhere in Europe. However, there is plenty to see around Spain relating to the civil war.

Arguably the best place to start is in Barcelona, where there are well-regarded walking tours focusing on the city's fascinating role in the war, including the location of the opening salvos in the conflict and the pock-marked walls of Plaça Sant Felip Neri.

The longest battle of the war, the battle of the Ebro, also took place in Catalonia. It lasted almost four months, and resulted in a conclusive victory for Franco's nationalist forces.

Of course, several thousand British volunteers travelled to Spain to form a part of the International Brigades, and the battlefields in this region are increasingly popular with those tracing relations who were part of this fighting force.

The experiences of the most famous British combatant, George Orwell, can be explored in the Monegros area of Aragon, where there are trenches and other remnants of his time in Spain.

The ruined town of Belchite in the Zaragoza region, another battleground, offers a sobering leftover of this conflict. As sites are spread out and in varying states of repair, you may find the most rewarding approach is to tie in exploring other aspects of Spain's history with that of its most recent and devastating conflict.

## TRAVEL TIPS

- **Iberia Nature** ([iberianature.com](http://iberianature.com)) is the best place for further information about Nick Lloyd's Civil War walking tours around Barcelona.
- **AITO** (Association of Independent Tour Operators, [aito.com/spain](http://aito.com/spain)) collects together many of the UK's best Spanish tour specialists.

## IF YOU LIKE THIS...

- Further south, the Civil War Air Raid Shelter and Museum in Cartagena is a small but fascinating look at life in the republican stronghold which suffered greatly during the conflict.



Wander the undisturbed ruins of Belchite, a village destroyed by intense fighting in 1937. A new village has arisen close by



# Sit back and enjoy the **Trans-Siberian Railway**

The mighty Trans-Siberian Railway has been rumbling across the Amur bridge – the longest on its path, and the crossing that completed its modern route – for 100 years this year. The first continuous Moscow to Vladivostok line was completed in 1904, but this included a section passing through Manchuria in China. Twelve years on, with the completion of the bridge, the line was completely running through Russian territory. The now familiar and very popular rail services to Beijing, via Manchuria and Mongolia, came a while later.

The Trans-Siberian offers a wonderful window on Russia, both through the people you meet en route and the view unfolding slowly before you. To get the most of the trip, plan to break the journey into several legs, which also gives you a break from riding the rails every few days. Historic Nizhny Novgorod is one of Russia's most attractive cities, located where the Volga and Oka rivers meet. Yekaterinburg, where the ill-fated Romanov family was executed in 1918, and Novosibirsk's slew of museums reward those who get off the train in its first few thousand miles. Russia's great inland sea, Lake Baikal, is another unmissable destination along the way. Further east, riverside Khabarovsk breaks the vista of endless taiga forest. Affordable flights can get you back to Moscow from Vladivostok, or those with fewer time (or budget) constraints can choose to travel on to glorious China and beyond.

The West Siberian Railway History Museum in Novosibirsk includes an open-air site with a number of locomotives as well as old Russian cars

“This historic route offers a wonderful window on Russia, through both the people and the view unfolding before you

## TRAVEL TIPS

● The Man in Seat 61 ([seat61.com](http://seat61.com)) is the best place for general information about taking a Trans-Siberian journey.

● The Trans-Siberian Travel Company ([thetransiberiantravelcompany.com](http://thetransiberiantravelcompany.com)) offers a huge range of tours and options on this mammoth journey.

## IF YOU LIKE THIS...

● India is another unmissable destination for those looking to combine history with railways galore.

● If onion domes without the effort of long-distance trains are your thing, then Kiev, Ukraine makes for a closer-to-home city destination.





# MALTA: THE LAND OF HEROES

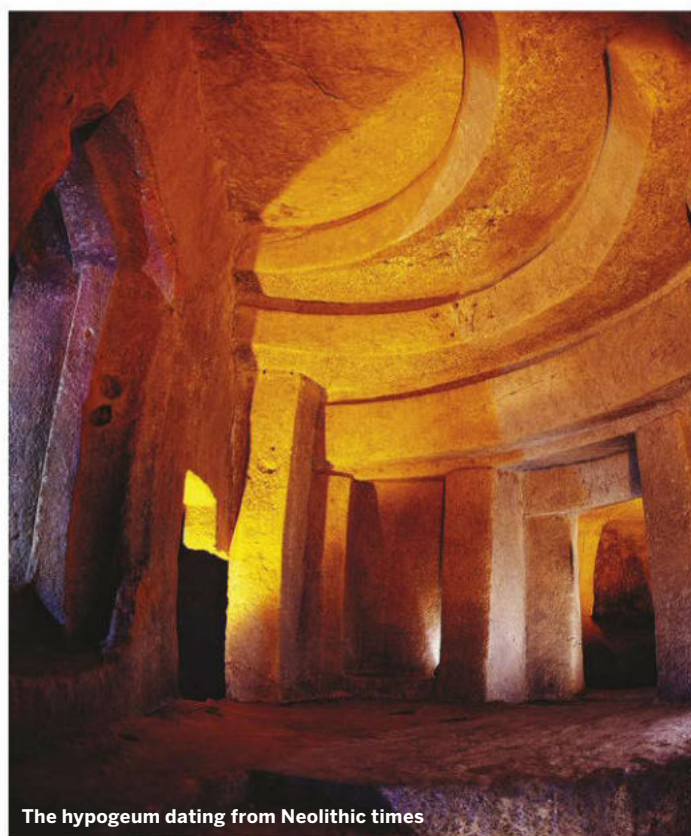
Packed with history and culture, discover the beautiful Maltese islands and the key role they have played in Europe through the centuries...

**C**ollectively, Malta and its sister islands, Gozo and Comino, are smaller than the Isle of Wight – but their size belies their history. Travel around Malta, and its rich past becomes evident – traces of prehistoric man, Neolithic burial sites, Bronze Age dolmens and Roman villas. And Gozo has the oldest known free-standing temple in the world.

Visit Malta's beautiful capital city, Valletta, and another key part of the island's history is revealed. After the Great Siege of 1565, the city was built by the Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St. John of Jerusalem, also known as the Knights Hospitaller. Embellished at the height of the baroque period, it grew into an economic, political and cultural hub, built by gentlemen for gentlemen. As you wander through their palaces,

courtyards and gardens, you'll certainly sense the knights' presence. In fact, all across the Maltese Islands, you'll find more evidence of their stay in their military engineering and architectural feats: forts, bastions, watch towers, aquaducts, churches and cathedrals. Not to mention the rich patrimony they bequeathed the islands with works of art, furniture, silverware and sculpture. Less evident, but no less important, is the place they gave the islands in the history of medicine. Their Sacra Infermeria in Valletta was the foremost hospital of Europe in its day.

A well-known legacy of the knights is the eight-pointed Maltese Cross. Officially adopted by the knights in 1126, its eight points denote their eight obligations: to live in truth, have faith, repent one's sins, give proof of humility, love justice, be



The hypogeum dating from Neolithic times

## TIMELINE:

### 3,500-2,500 BC

The Maltese Islands went through a golden Neolithic period, with construction of many temples

### 60 AD

St. Paul was shipwrecked on the island while on his way to Rome and brought Christianity to Malta

### 870 AD

The Arabs conquered the islands and left an important mark on the Maltese language

### 1530-1798

The Knights Hospitaller ruled over Malta, bequeathed to them by Charles

### 1798

Napoleon Bonaparte took over Malta from the Knights Hospitaller on his way to Egypt

### 2004

Malta joined the European Union

### 1964

Malta gained independence from Britain, and became a republic a decade later

### 1939-45

During WWII, Malta's position in the Mediterranean made it a key stronghold

### 1914-18

During WWI, Malta was known as the 'Nurse of the Mediterranean' as most British soldiers injured at Gallipoli were sent there





Saluting Battery at Upper Barracca Gardens, Valletta

merciful, be sincere and whole-hearted, and to endure persecution. Over time, the eight points also came to represent the eight 'langues' (national groupings) of the noblemen who were admitted into the brotherhood, namely those of Auvergne, Provence, France, Aragon, Castille and Portugal, Italy, Baviere (Germany), and England (with Scotland and

*The eight points of the Maltese Cross denote the eight obligations of the Knights of St. John*

Ireland). Even today, the Maltese Cross remains the symbol of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta.

Malta's more recent history is also intriguing. During World War II, the island was a key strategic asset for the Allies to sustain their North African campaign, and from which they could launch their eventual attack on mainland Italy. But earlier in the war, the islands were subject to severe bombardments. In view of this, the entire population of Malta was awarded the George Cross, Britain's highest civilian honour for bravery.

The end of the war saw the islands economically and physically devastated. It took several decades and further restructuring, once the British forces left Malta completely in 1979, to rebuild the economy. Today, Malta is a blooming flower in the Mediterranean – a perfect blend of hospitality, history and heroes.

## EVENTS:



George Cross Re-Enactment 2013

### 15 APRIL – GEORGE CROSS COMMEMORATION

Watch a Son et Lumière commemorating Malta receiving the George Cross Medal on 15 April 1942. Venue: St George's Square, Valletta. Seating: 19.15 Start of event: 19.45 ending 21.00. Admission free.

### 21 SEPTEMBER – INDEPENDENCE DAY

Enjoy the festivities, as Malta celebrates gaining political independence from Britain in 1964.

### 1-2 OCTOBER – BIRGUFEST

Lit by thousands of candles, the ancient city of Birgu (also known as Vittoriosa) comes alive with concerts, exhibitions and stalls offering delicious Maltese food.

### 8-9 OCTOBER – MALTA MILITARY TATTOO

All ages will enjoy the pomp and ceremony of this military parade with its gathering of international bands. Visit [www.mfcc.com.mt](http://www.mfcc.com.mt) or [www.ticketline.com.mt](http://www.ticketline.com.mt) to buy your tickets.

## CONTACT DETAILS

**TELEPHONE** 356 22915440/1

**EMAIL** [info@visitmalta.com](mailto:info@visitmalta.com)

**WEBSITE** [visitmalta.com](http://visitmalta.com)



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# Step over the channel to see the wealth of memorials to the

Centennial events surrounding the First World War continue in 2016, with the commemoration of the battle of the Somme the most notable. The official ceremony will be taking place at the Thiepval Memorial in northern France on 1 July 2016, with access limited to those successful in applying for tickets in a ballot that has now closed. However, the Somme can be explored at any time and will be quieter away from the actual anniversary date.

The offensive covered a large area, with many notable locations that can be visited today. Largely these are within a short drive of Calais, and reward those who plan a self-drive itinerary, but there are also increasingly opportunities to explore little-known areas by hiking and biking trails. The peace and beauty of much of the valley offers a contrast with the violence that took place here, and gives space and time to contemplate the events that unfolded.

Begin your visit at the Historial de la Grande Guerre in Péronne, around 40 miles east of Amiens, then head to Thiepval and the cluster of memorials north of Albert including the imposing Ulster Memorial Tower.

The Lochnagar Crater, formed on the first day of the battle of the Somme, is a symbol of the destruction caused. The Musée Franco-Australien and nearby Australian War Memorial are popular sites of pilgrimage for those seeking to understand the Commonwealth contribution.

The Cross of Sacrifice stands over the graves at Thiepval. The Memorial to the Missing of the Somme and a visitor centre are located nearby

## TRAVEL TIPS

- Comprehensive guidance for exploring the Somme battlefields, plus walking trails, can be found at [greatwar.co.uk/somme](http://greatwar.co.uk/somme)
- Battlefield Tours ([battlefield-tours.com](http://battlefield-tours.com)) offer a range of self-drive tours around sites associated with the Great War.

## IF YOU LIKE THIS...

- The mountainous areas associated with the Italian front in the First World War, especially around Asiago, are a less popular but worthy destination.
- The end of the war led, of course, to the Treaty of Versailles, and the eponymous palace remains one of France's most astonishing attractions.





# battle of the Somme



“The peace and beauty of much of the valley offers a contrast with the violence that took place here



## AUGUST

Explore the **USA's** national heritage

The centenary of the United States National Parks Service and the collection of extraordinary protected areas under its auspices, provides a fantastic excuse for a themed visit to America. While the notion of an American national park doubtless delivers images of the billowing geysers of Yellowstone or the mammoth vistas of the Grand Canyon, the NPS also has in its care some of America's greatest historical heritage.

In Philadelphia, whose downtown hums with historical significance, Independence National Historical Park is home to the Liberty Bell and many other sites and memorials associated with the events that gave birth to the country.

There are dozens of other historic parks and sites maintained by the service that can take the visitor into unexpected territory. One example is at Natchez, Mississippi which preserves and explains the

extraordinary collection of an antebellum estate, a French colonial fort and downtown home of African-American diarist William Johnson, all set by the iconic Mississippi river. Natchez also marks its tricentennial in 2016, giving extra impetus to visiting this little-explored corner of America's south. The town lies at the end of the Natchez Trace Parkway, an incredible drive from Nashville, Tennessee – itself not short on interesting history.

America's national parks offer a fabulous framework for a road trip, though distances can be daunting if you're aiming to get from one side of the country to the other. If time and stamina are short, pick a section of the country and see it in detail, pausing frequently. August is peak season in the States but it is also when campsites, RV parks and other traveller-friendly facilities are open. Consider booking ahead for guided tours, especially at more popular national parks.

**TRAVEL TIPS**

- Travel company **Kuoni** ([kuoni.co.uk](http://kuoni.co.uk)) can provide a range of self drive and motor-home holidays in the USA, offering popular itineraries and tailor-made trips.
- The US National Parks Service ([nps.gov](http://nps.gov)) itself is the best place to book ahead for walks and other popular services.

**IF YOU LIKE THIS...**

- Australia's national parks are often repositories of heritage as well as natural wonders – a great example is Botany Bay National Park, home to both a monument marking Cook's 1770 landing and one dedicated to French explorer La Perouse, who turned up a few days later.



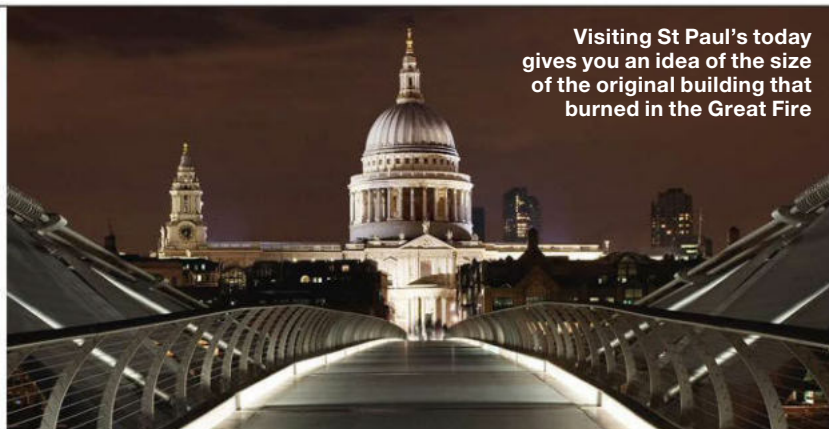
The Liberty Bell – the iconic symbol of American independence, at home in Philadelphia

## SEPTEMBER

Follow the path of the **Great Fire of London**

A date of infamy for Londoners: 2 September 1666. On this day the Great Fire started. After tearing through the city for four days and nights it left much of the city in ruins. Some 13,200 houses, more than 80 churches and dozens of the city's famous livery halls were taken by the flames. Though today's city is unrecognisable, the fire retains a strong hold on the imagination and offers plenty to keep young explorers in particular enthralled. This year, of course, marks the 350th anniversary of the event.

A day is ample to explore sites related to the blaze, and the fire's trail is easy to follow around the Square Mile. Pudding Lane, the location of the start of the inferno, is marked by a plaque. Nearby St Magnus the Martyr, part of the historic



Visiting St Paul's today gives you an idea of the size of the original building that burned in the Great Fire

pathway to old London Bridge, was one of the first churches to burn and also where fire-fighting equipment was stored. Inside the rebuilt church is a model of the medieval London Bridge, complete with houses and chapel. Of all the buildings that went up in flames, St Paul's

Cathedral was the most iconic, and exploring today's church that replaced the burnt gothic behemoth will give some clues as to the size and shape of the former building. Lastly, but by no means least, the Wren-designed monument to the fire – which gave its name to the adjacent

tube station – has friezes depicting the blaze, various inscriptions on its sides and a platform offering superb views of the changing face of the city. Finally, the excellent Museum of London tells the story of the fire and other events in the capital's colourful history.

**TRAVEL TIPS**

- Visit London ([visitlondon.com](http://visitlondon.com)) is the official site for information on the city.

**IF YOU LIKE THIS...**

- 17th-century Europe's golden age can be explored in London's mercantile rival, Amsterdam.
- London lost many of its medieval buildings in the fire but towns like Shrewsbury retain a good stock from this period.



# Travel Broadens the Mind

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# DISCOVER THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME

On the centenary of one of the fiercest battles of WWI, the war cemeteries and memorials on the Somme have a powerful story to tell...

**T**he Battle of the Somme is often remembered for the opening day – 1 July 1916 – when more than 57,000 British Army soldiers were killed or wounded. But the fighting continued through the summer, the rain and mud of the autumn, until the freezing cold of November. Men from every corner of Great Britain and her Empire served, fought and died on the Somme.

Today, the cemeteries and memorials built and cared for by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) portray the human cost of the fighting that took place across the battlefields throughout the war. From small cemeteries with a few dozen graves, hidden away down rough tracks in farmers' fields, to overwhelming 'silent cities', where thousands of men were

laid to rest. The imposing monument at Thiepval is the largest Commonwealth war memorial in the world, bearing the names of 72,000 soldiers who have no grave.

*Every cemetery, every headstone and every name has a story to tell...*

The centenary of the Battle of the Somme is the perfect time to visit the area and contemplate the events of a century ago. Every cemetery, every headstone and every name has a story to tell.

A major international event at the Thiepval Memorial on 1 July 2016 is open to ticket holders only, but there will be a daily commemorative event at the memorial, as well as other events across the battlefields, throughout the centenary of the battle.



Caterpillar Valley Cemetery, France

## DOWNLOAD OUR NEW APP

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission has released a brand new War Graves App.

Discover the 23,000 locations, in 150 countries, where British and Commonwealth casualties, who sacrificed their lives during the two World Wars, are remembered.

View all the war cemeteries and memorials from around the world, or find out where your nearest war graves are and how to find them.

Download for free, on iOS, Android and Windows from the CWGC website at

**[www.cwgc.org/app](http://www.cwgc.org/app)**







The Somme battlefield is dominated by the Memorial to the Missing at Thiepval, which is inscribed with the names of soldiers with no known grave



## DON'T MISS:



### DEVONSHIRE CEMETERY, FRANCE

Shortly before the first day of the Battle of the Somme, William Noel Hodgson wrote the poem *Before Battle*, with its famous closing lines: "By all delights that I shall miss, Help me to die, O Lord." He was killed when his battalion attacked Mametz, and he is buried along with his comrades in this intimate and moving cemetery.

### SERRE ROAD NO.2 CEMETERY, FRANCE

The Somme saw the destruction of many of the 'Pals' Battalions which were formed of men from the same communities, clubs, or workplaces. Many lost their lives near the village of Serre, and this cemetery – the largest on the Somme – is the burial place of more than 2,000 men who died during the battle in 1916.

### CATERPILLAR VALLEY CEMETERY, FRANCE

With commanding views of the battlefields and the notorious High Wood and Delville Wood, this is an essential visit for understanding the fighting and its cost. A memorial here commemorates more than 1,200 New Zealanders who have no known grave, and is a powerful reminder of the Commonwealth sacrifice.

Serre Road No 2 Cemetery, France



Thiepval Anglo-French Cemetery with the Memorial to the Missing in the background



## CONTACT DETAILS

**ADDRESS** The Commonwealth War Graves Commission,  
2 Marlow Road, Maidenhead, Berkshire, SL6 7DX, UK

**TELEPHONE** +44 (0) 1628 507200

**EMAIL** [enquiries@cwgc.org](mailto:enquiries@cwgc.org)

**WEBSITE** [cwgc.org](http://cwgc.org)



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**OCTOBER**

## Take a tour of the **Norman conquest**

**T**he Norman Conquest, marking its 950th anniversary this October, pivotally shaped the destiny of England and France for centuries. What better way to spend autumn than by exploring sites on both sides of the channel associated with William, Harold, 1066 and all that?

The English side of things is well known, from Battle Abbey, scene of the decisive victory for the Normans on 14 October, to Westminster Abbey, where William was crowned on Christmas Day 1066. Also of interest may be visits to Stamford Bridge and Fulford in East Yorkshire, scenes of crucial clashes between English and Viking forces the preceding month. Of course, remains of Conquest-era Norman castles dot the English countryside.

On French soil, the Bayeux Tapestry is the obvious starting point for a William the Conqueror tour of Normandy. It is, as one would expect of a world-famous treasure, a popular and busy place to visit. Happily there are many other fascinating places in the region to discover related to William's life. The seat of Norman dukes at Falaise is where William was born, as well as being home to a wonderfully evocative later castle. William's much-disturbed tomb is at the Abbey of Saint-Étienne in Caen, a city founded by him. At Caen's chateau there are well-preserved ramparts, the 12th-century Église St-Georges, excellent museums and superb views over the surrounding area.

### TRAVEL TIPS

● **Allez France** ([allezfrance.com](http://allezfrance.com)) are French holiday specialists who can help with planning and accommodation.  
 ● **Normandy Tourism** has lots of practical information available at [en.normandie-tourisme.fr](http://en.normandie-tourisme.fr)

### IF YOU LIKE THIS...

● The beautiful island of Sicily has a less famous Norman history, including the tombs of Norman counts and later kings in Palermo's cathedral.

“What better way to spend autumn than by exploring sites on both sides of the channel linked with William, Harold and 1066?”



The ruins of Battle Abbey is a popular destination for those looking to follow in the footsteps of Harold and William

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## NOVEMBER

### Be amazed by Mexico City

If you watched the opening sequence of James Bond's latest adventure *Spectre*, open-mouthed at the stunning architecture of Mexico City, then you may be intrigued to learn that it is a wonderful place to explore both pre-Hispanic and colonial history. This city of over 20 million people is quickly growing as a tourist destination, and there are months of things to see from museums to murals, galleries to ancient sites.

Over 1,500 buildings in the Unesco World Heritage-listed Centro Histórico alone are classified as monuments. After exploring the Palacio Nacional's Diego Rivera murals, iconic, vast Catedral Metropolitana and the fascinating excavations at the nearby Templo Mayor, you should head for Xochimilco, a tranquil canal system that can give you some idea of the pre-colonial makeup of the city.

And a further counterweight to the modern city is the pre-Hispanic remains at Teotihuacan, 30 miles from Mexico City. This essential day-trip is described by Unesco as "one of the most powerful cultural centres in Mesoamerica" – one glance at the vast pyramids of the sun and moon and temple of Quetzalcoatl bear witness to the strength of the civilisation that ruled here.

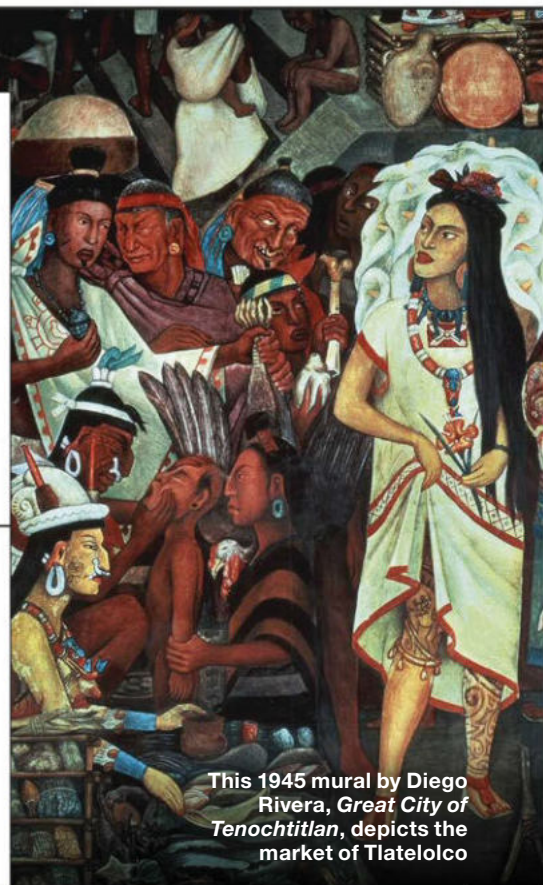
Back in the city, while it can be hard to choose from the myriad outstanding museums and galleries, the Museo Nacional de Antropología will answer most questions you have about Mexico's historical treasures. Mexico City is every bit as noisy, colourful and intense as you'd expect a city this vast to be – and that's precisely why it is an essential part of understanding the wider region's amazing history and culture.

#### TRAVEL TIPS

- Journey Latin America ([journeylatinamerica.co.uk](http://journeylatinamerica.co.uk)) offers a variety of trips exploring Mexico, many of which include a visit to the capital.
- Visit Mexico has lots of tips on Mexico City ([visitmexico.com/en/mexico-city](http://visitmexico.com/en/mexico-city)) as well as the rest of this large, diverse country.

#### IF YOU LIKE THIS...

- Havana, Cuba is another fast-changing city destination with a rich history.
- Peru makes for a good alternative if you're looking for amazing pre-Colombian civilisation and well-developed tourist facilities.



This 1945 mural by Diego Rivera, *Great City of Tenochtitlan*, depicts the market of Tlatelolco

## DECEMBER

### Experience Shackleton's Antarctica

A winter voyage to Antarctica, taken in reality or planned from the warmth of an armchair, is a good excuse to celebrate the colourful life of Ernest Shackleton. The polar explorer died en route to the southern continent in 1922, and was buried in the cemetery at Grytviken, South Georgia. This tiny whaling settlement was where Shackleton had found salvation in 1916, after undertaking with a small team a heroic boat journey from Elephant Island, then trekking over the mountains of South Georgia to rescue his stranded crew. As well as Grytviken, Shackleton's hut from the Nimrod expedition at Cape Royds on Ross Island remains astonishingly well preserved.

Meanwhile, the Antarctic Museum at Port Lockroy in British Antarctic Territory contains the leftovers of generations of polar explorers.



Shackleton's hut at Cape Royds has been painstakingly restored and is open to visitors

It would take several visits to Antarctica to take in all the places mentioned here. Should you wish to explore Shackleton's life closer to home, start at his alma mater of Dulwich College in south London. Here

the *James Caird*, the ship that undertook the journey from Elephant Island, is on display. In Dundee, the *Discovery*, in which Shackleton sailed to Antarctica with Scott in 1901, can be explored.

#### TRAVEL TIPS

- Discover the World ([discover-the-world.co.uk](http://discover-the-world.co.uk)) specialises in polar adventures, including small-ship expeditions to Antarctica. Also see Peregrine Adventures ([peregrineadventures.com](http://peregrineadventures.com)).
- The UK Antarctic Heritage Trust ([ukaht.org](http://ukaht.org)) has a fascinating website and a museum at Port Lockroy.

#### IF YOU LIKE THIS...

- If Antarctica is too far, Iceland is wild, wintry and easy to get to from the UK with budget airlines.
- Southern Chile is almost as close as you can get to Antarctica without the cost and time of taking a trip there.



[www.visit1066country.com/950](http://www.visit1066country.com/950)



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# VISIT

## 1066 COUNTRY

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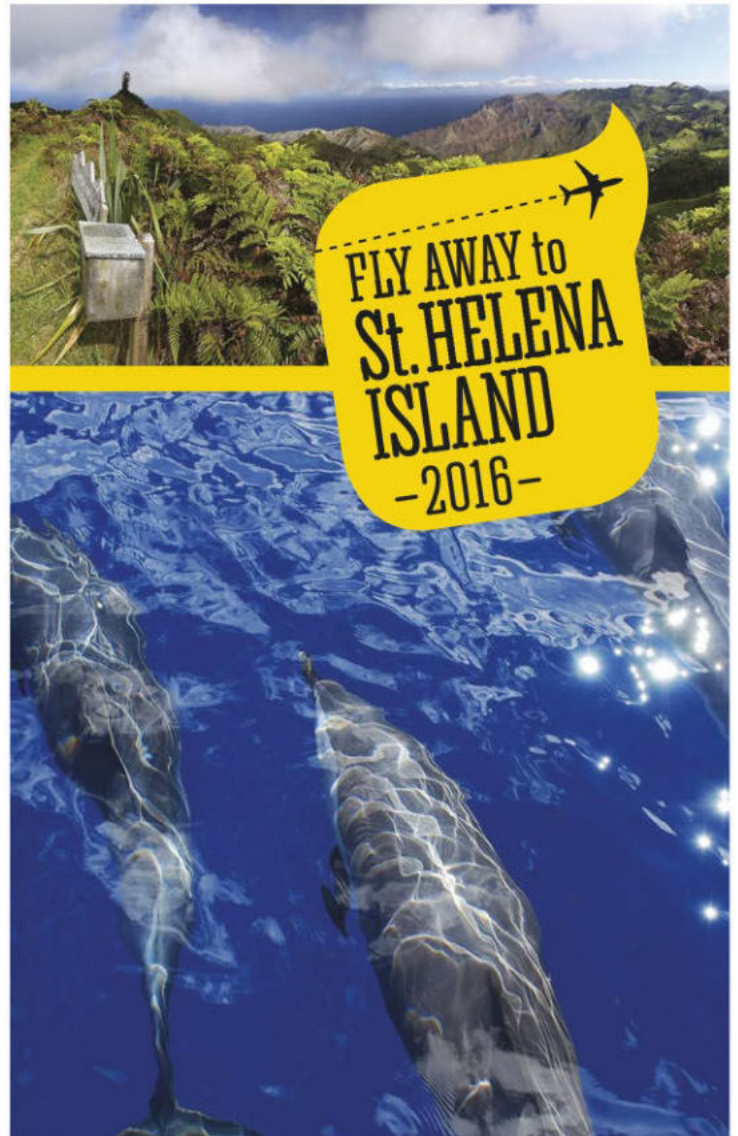
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## Wrap up warm in **Istanbul** without the crowds

Rapidly emerging as a year-round city destination, Istanbul offers a short break almost without equal. Historical interest is found in every corner of what was Byzantium, then Constantinople but it's worth looking beyond big-hitters to escape the crowds, even if the city welcomes fewer visitors at this time of year. So, do go and see Hagia Sophia (preferably first thing in the morning), the Basilica Cistern, the Istanbul Archaeological Museum's incredible Alexander Sarcophagus and the giant chains once used to block entry into the Golden Horn... but then explore a little wider.

A particular highlight is the less well-known group of former churches housing Byzantine-era mosaics. The Chora Church (Kariye Müzezi) and less well-known Pammakaristos Church in the Fatih district offer a more intimate take on the city's Byzantine history than Hagia Sophia. The city's 'other' mosques often also get scandalously low billing on visitors' itineraries. Picking pretty much any of the city's great mosques beyond the Blue Mosque will give you a more local-eye-view on how the rhythms of daily life interact with their faith. The Süleymaniye Mosque is the largest and grandest and you are welcome to visit provided prayers are not taking place.

One of the delights of Istanbul is the mix of modern convenience and the timeless delights of the city. While the Bosphorus Tunnel speeds commuters between Europe and Asia, ferries ply their traditional trade, and the bazaars are as bustling and unmissable as they have been for centuries.

Istanbul can be chilly in January, with showers, but this means that you have all the more excuses to seek out cosy nooks across the city for regular tea breaks to watch the world go by.

“Istanbul offers a short break almost without equal. Historical interest is found in every corner of what was Byzantium



The interior of the splendid Hagia Sofia, now a museum in central Istanbul

### TRAVEL TIPS

- Turkey Travel Planner ([turkeytravelplanner.com](http://turkeytravelplanner.com)) is an unbeatable resource for planning a trip to Istanbul and beyond.
- Regent Holidays ([regent-holidays.co.uk](http://regent-holidays.co.uk)) can help plan a city break in Istanbul.

### IF YOU LIKE THIS...

- Bursa is another exciting Turkish city, with beautiful mosques and Ottoman architecture that gets far fewer visitors than nearby Istanbul.
- Europe also meets the Middle East in the atmospheric port city of Tangier, Morocco.



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# Your next break in Normandy?

2016 marks the 950<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Norman invasion.

Born in Falaise, William, Duke of Normandy, became the Conqueror at the Battle of Hastings in 1066, the story of which is told in the unique Bayeux Tapestry. To celebrate this occasion, from April to December, there will be medieval merriment for everyone throughout Normandy with street markets, festivals, music, dance, sound and light shows and special exhibitions in the towns and villages associated with William the Conqueror and his momentous expedition.

**A très bientôt en Normandie !**

[medieval-normandy.co.uk](http://medieval-normandy.co.uk)

